



The Huns

HYUN JIN KIM

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The
Huns

HYUN JIN KIM

The Huns

This volume is a concise introduction to the history and culture of the Huns. This ancient people had a famous reputation in Eurasian Late Antiquity. However, their history has often been evaluated as a footnote in the histories of the later Roman Empire and early Germanic peoples. Kim addresses this imbalance and challenges the commonly held assumption that the Huns were a savage people who contributed little to world history, examining striking geopolitical changes brought about by the Hunnic expansion over much of continental Eurasia and revealing the Huns' contribution to European, Iranian, Chinese and Indian civilization and statecraft. By examining Hunnic culture as a Eurasian whole, *The Huns* provides a full picture of their society which demonstrates that this was a complex group with a wide variety of ethnic and linguistic identities. Making available critical information from both primary and secondary sources regarding the Huns' Inner Asian origins, which would otherwise be largely unavailable to most English speaking students and Classical scholars, this is a crucial tool for those interested in the study of Eurasian Late Antiquity.

Hyun Jin Kim is Lecturer in Classics at the University of Melbourne, Australia.

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INTRODUCTION

The Huns! The name of this ancient people triggers a multiplicity of responses and evokes a number of images (nearly all of them negative). Traditionally in Western Europe the Huns were identified with unspeakable savagery, destruction and barbarism. The name Hun in Western European parlance was a term of abuse, a derogatory epithet that one would use to defame a foreign enemy, such as imperial Germany in World War I which was labelled 'the Huns' by the hostile British and American press. The Huns have attained almost legendary status as the quintessential 'savage' nation, 'a parasitic mob' according to one modern historian, 'running a vast protection racket'. Such is their reputation that even in academia there is still today a residue of this image of the 'cruel savage'. In the not so distant past some scholars even argued without hesitation that the Huns contributed nothing to European civilization. All the Huns did was destroy and plunder, so it was claimed.

However, as more evidence on the Huns and their empires came to light via the spectacular research of Inner Asian Studies experts, more recent scholarship on the Huns has begun to adopt a more balanced approach. It acknowledges that the 'notorious' Huns and other associated Inner Asian peoples were certainly not the simple 'savages' of lore, but a significant historical force not just in 'Europe', but also in 'Asia'. The geographical division between Asia and Europe is hardly realistic when discussing a truly pan-Eurasian phenomenon such as the Huns and a pan-Eurasian phenomenon requires an Eurasian approach, which treats 'Asian' and 'European' history holistically, not as separate disciplines. Only then can one do justice to the striking geopolitical changes brought about by the Hunnic expansion over much of continental Eurasia. We, therefore, need to approach the socio-political, historical and geographical background of the Huns with this understanding in mind.

INNER ASIA: THE HOMELAND OF THE HUNS

In order to understand the real Huns, it is first necessary to discuss the region from which they originate, Inner Asia. Inner Asia is a term coined by modern historians to denote primarily (though not exclusively) the historical geography of peoples whom we commonly

label 'steppe nomads'. It would be a great mistake, however, to consider Inner Asia to consist of purely grass steppeland or think Inner Asians were solely 'nomads'. Inner Asia, as defined by eminent historians such as Denis Sinor and Peter Golden, is a vast region encompassing all of what is today called Central Asia (the five Central Asian republics and Afghanistan), almost all of what is now southern Russia from western Siberia to the Pacific Ocean in the Far East, all of modern Mongolia and large portions of northern and western China. In this vast area there are extremes of climate, diverse ecosystems and varied topography. Inner Asia contains both regions with near arctic weather conditions and also some of the world's hottest and most inhospitable deserts. Oases, deserts, many of the world's highest mountain ranges, temperate forests, taiga, as well as the steppes constitute the physical geography of Inner Asia.

The peoples who historically called Inner Asia home were likewise equally diverse in their way of life. Inner Asia was home to pastoralists (whom we often mistakenly label as nomads), agriculturalists (farmers), hunter-gatherers and urban-dwellers. In many cases all four categories of peoples were to be found living in the same or adjacent regions in a complicated symbiotic system. A person belonging to one category could just as easily experience the lifestyle of the other categories during his or her lifetime. Many of these peoples also spoke multiple languages belonging to at least three, different, major language families: Altaic (thought to consist of Turkic, Mongolic and Tugusic languages: all mutually unintelligible); Indo-European (mainly Iranian and Tocharian languages); Yeniseian (now largely extinct languages spoken by indigenous peoples such as the Kets in central Siberia). The speakers of these three language families were also in frequent contact with other groups bordering Inner Asia who all spoke different languages. To the southeast of Inner Asia there were the Sino-Tibetan language groups (most prominently Chinese). To the southwest, Inner Asians interacted with Iranian and Semitic language speakers of the Middle East and also at times with the Indo-Iranian languages of South Asia (the Indian sub-continent). To the northwest they met the Indo-European and Uralic languages of Europe and western Siberia. All these groups and languages influenced Inner Asians and were in turn influenced by Inner Asians.

In this complex world language did not always automatically lead to ethnic identity. Many Inner Asians had multiple identities. For instance a pastoralist in the fifth century AD living in what is now modern day Uzbekistan on the fringes of the steppe zone near the great urban centres of Samarkand and Bukhara may have spoken primarily a Turkic language when with other pastoralists, but when he frequented the cities to trade his livestock and acquire other much

needed commodities he would have conversed just as easily in Sogdian (an East Iranian language). He may have at some stage in his life decided to settle as a city merchant or perhaps chosen the path of a mercenary soldier in the service of the local urban ruler, who may himself have come from the steppes. Equally frequent would have been the journey in the opposite direction. A Sogdian merchant from Bukhara or Samarkand could frequent the pastoralist communities in the neighbourhood, maybe intermarry with his trade-partners and speak with equal proficiency the Turkic language of his in-laws as his native Sogdian. Neither the pastoralist who settled in the city nor the city-dweller who made his home in the steppes would have been regarded as particularly alien by the hosts. In fact during the fifth century AD both men would have belonged to the same political community and have been categorized as 'Huns', who were then ruling the region, while preserving also their multiple ethnic/sub-ethnic and linguistic identities. Their transition from one identity to another or conflation of multiple identities would have seemed distinctly normal.

Furthermore, our pastoralist turned urban-dweller and urban merchant turned pastoralist may in their lifetimes have been exposed to various belief systems: to Turko-Mongol shamanism and Iranian Zoroastrianism from their native regions; Buddhism making inroads from India in the south; Nestorian Christianity and Manichaeism being imported from the Middle East and the Mediterranean; even some doses of Chinese esoteric ideas (e.g. Daoism) from the east. They could have been practitioners of one or several of these different belief systems, quite remarkably without the bloodshed and agonizing conflict that usually accompanied contacts between multiple belief systems in other parts of the world. Even more astonishingly perhaps, they could do what no other Eurasians could do with ease, that is physically travel to the places of origin of all these belief systems and ideas, since their native Inner Asia bordered all the other regions of Eurasia.

What this demonstrates is the pluralism that was inherent to Inner Asian societies during the time of the Huns and also the geographical centrality of Inner Asia. Inner Asia was the critical link that connected all the great civilizations of Eurasia to each other: India, China, Iran and the Mediterranean world. Whatever happened in Inner Asia, therefore, had the potential to affect all the above mentioned adjacent regions of Eurasia.

While the complexity and importance of Inner Asia described above applies equally to Inner Asia of all time periods, the period we shall be focusing on in this book is obviously the Hunnic period, roughly from the third century BC to the end of the sixth century AD, but also

extending into later centuries via the brief coverage of the history of the successors to the legacy of the Huns. The history and impact of the Huns on both Inner Asia and the regions adjacent to Inner Asia during these centuries will be examined throughout this book.

NOMADS? THE HUNS, A HETEROGENEOUS AGRO-PASTORALIST SOCIETY

So, the Huns were from Inner Asia and therefore they were Inner Asians. However, what does that mean in practice? When one evokes the image of the Huns, one often imagines a fur-clad, primitive-looking race of nomads (usually of mongoloid extraction) emerging out of the 'backward' steppes of Inner Asia. Indeed the original Huns in Inner Asia were mostly pastoralists, partially or predominantly of Mongoloid extraction (at least initially). However, the term 'nomad', if it denotes a wandering group of people with no clear sense of territory, cannot be applied wholesale to the Huns. All the so-called 'nomads' of Eurasian steppe history were peoples whose territory/territories were usually clearly defined, who as pastoralists moved about in search of pasture, but within a fixed territorial space. One should not imagine that 'nomads' of the Eurasian steppe region lived in a political and geographical void with no territory and political control. Far from it, the 'nomads' such as the Huns operated under tight political organization and like other Inner Asian peoples described briefly above they were in fact hardly homogeneous either in lifestyle or in ethnic composition.

Most steppe confederacies and 'nomadic' state or proto-state entities in Eurasian history possessed both pastoralist and sedentary populations and the Huns were certainly no exception to this general rule. These Inner Asian peoples, as already pointed out, were also highly heterogeneous both ethnically/racially and linguistically. The Huns themselves when they first entered Europe from Inner Asia were in all probability multi-ethnic and multi-lingual, consisting of a mix of a variety of Turkic and Iranian speaking peoples and ethnicities. Therefore, when one talks of the Huns, one should not necessarily assume that they constitute an ethnic group or racial group. Rather what one encounters is a complex political entity that consists of a wide variety of ethnic, racial and religious sub-categories, all in the process of fusion or acculturation, accommodating a great diversity of lifestyles and customs. In other words we are dealing with a state or proto-state entity of imperial dimensions with a distinct Inner Asian flavour, rather than a simple, primitive ethnic, tribal or clan grouping. In fact the so-called 'backward' steppes of Eurasia was far from

‘primitive’ or ‘backward’ and modern archaeology has done wonders in revealing the astonishing sophistication of Inner Asian civilizations prior to the rise of the Huns.

The history of Huns is as intriguing and complex as that of any other ‘great’ ‘civilized’ peoples of the ancient world, be they the Romans or the Greeks. What we encounter in the Huns of Inner Asia is a civilization that has been comparatively neglected by historians, whose contribution to world history has been consistently overlooked and under-estimated. This book has the aim of introducing the history and culture of the historical and archaeological (not the mythical, legendary and imaginary) Huns to the wider reading public and in particular to undergraduate students who are learning about the Huns for the first time and who may not be well acquainted with the history of either Inner Asia or Late Antique and Early Medieval Europe. As such it cannot systematically address all the complex issues and debates pertaining to the Huns. Notes have been reduced to a minimum to facilitate an easy read for the beginner and where greater discussion and extensive citations might be desired by the more academic readers, directions will be given to other major academic publications either by the author or by other experts on the subject. However, the book will nonetheless attempt to present some new innovative perspectives and where necessary will provide essential references and notes to support and illustrate the contention or argument being made for that purpose.

THE QUEST FOR ETHNICITY AND ORIGINS: WHO ARE THE HUNS?

Part of the difficulty with writing a history of a people like the Huns is the perplexing and seemingly endless debate about who they actually were. Where did they come from and with which historically attested group(s) of people or state entities should they be identified or associated with? These are big questions that have often frustrated the attempts at explanation by numerous scholars in the past. Fortunately for us new literary and archaeological evidence that has accumulated over the past six decades has completely revolutionized our understanding of the Huns, of who they were and has made the entire question regarding their origin and affiliation (ethnic and political) easier to answer.

In the eighteenth century the remarkable Jesuit priest Deguignes in his now almost legendary work, *Histoire générale des Huns, des Turcs, des Mogols et des autres Tartares occidentaux* (1756–1824), made quite a spectacular conjecture based on his intuition. He equated the

European Huns of the fourth and fifth centuries AD with the earlier powerful and sophisticated Xiongnu people (in what is now Mongolia) who appear in Chinese historical records of the Han dynasty (206 BC–220 AD). This conjecture then triggered a lively debate that has continued unabated for centuries. Historians and experts on the Huns and Inner Asia (most notably the great scholars Maenchen-Helfen and Sinor) tended to voice scepticism about the Hun-Xiongnu connection. They suggested that if any connections existed between the Huns and the Xiongnu, they are only likely to have been cultural affinities of some sort rather than blood connections. However, this very debate regarding the Hun-Xiongnu connection was often based on the erroneous assumption that the Huns and Xiongnu constituted a specific race or a particular ethnic category. As explained above, the Huns and other Inner Asian steppe peoples like the Xiongnu must be viewed as heterogeneous political categories rather than homogenous ethnic groups. The key to understanding the links between the Xiongnu and the Huns is to recognize that the transmission of cultural and political heritage matters far more than potential ‘genetic’ links between the two groups.

Due to the excellent research of La Vaissière and others we are now more than ever before certain that the name Hun denoted the ancient Xiongnu. The first indication to that effect came in 1948 when Henning published a letter written by a Sogdian merchant named Nanaivande dating to the year 313 AD. It was a letter sent from the Gansu region of western China relating the fall of the imperial Chinese capital Luoyang to the Southern Xiongnu in 311 AD. In it Nanaivande without any ambiguity calls the Xiongnu Huns. More recent evidence collected by La Vaissière, the translations of ancient Buddhist sutras *Tathagataguhyasutra* and *Lalitavistara* by Zhu Fahu, a Buddhist monk from the western Chinese city of Dunhuang, who was of Central Asian Bactrian descent, reaffirmed this identification. Zhu Fahu, whose translations are dated to 280 AD and 308 AD respectively (so roughly contemporaneous with Nanaivande’s letter), identifies again without any ambiguity or generalization the *Huna* (appellation of the Huns in Indian sources) with the Xiongnu, as a specific political entity adjacent to China.¹ Therefore, it is now perfectly clear that the imperial Xiongnu of Mongolia and China and the European-Central Asian Huns had exactly the same name.²

The archaeological evidence is more difficult to interpret, since the old practice of identifying archaeological cultures with ethnic groups cannot be seen as completely valid. The evidence available does, nonetheless, support the existence of strong cultural links between the European-Central Asian Huns and the old territory ruled by the Xiongnu. Most Inner Asian scholars now agree that Hunnic cauldrons,

one of the key archaeological markers of Hunnic presence, ultimately derive from Xiongnu cauldrons in the Ordos region in Inner Mongolia.³ These cauldrons, which clearly had a religious function, were used in the same way in both earlier Xiongnu and later Hunnic contexts, their placement being on the banks of rivers. Cultural and religious continuity can therefore be argued for between the Xiongnu of Mongolia and the Huns in Central Asia and Europe. Naturally the fact that the Huns and Xiongnu had the same ethnic or rather political name and shared very similar religious and cultural practices does not prove conclusively that the Huns and Xiongnu were genetically related, though it does make the case quite likely. However, the very fixation with identifying genetic/racial affinity is quite absurd when one takes into consideration the nature of the population groups that constituted the Xiongnu and the Huns.

The old territory of the Xiongnu was home to a great variety of ethnic groups and also language groups. Our Chinese sources indicate that the Xiongnu Empire absorbed numerous nations of North Asia including the Mongolic speaking Donghu people to the east and the Indo-European speaking Yuezhi people (possibly Tocharians in what is now western China) to the west. There was doubtlessly also a large population of Turkic and Iranian language speakers among the Xiongnu. One of our extant sources furthermore indicates that some of the Xiongnu, in particular the Jie tribe of the wider Xiongnu confederation, spoke a Yeniseian language. The Chinese source *Jin Shu* (95.2486), compiled in the seventh century AD, gives us a rare transliteration of a Xiongnu Jie song composed in a language most likely related to Yeniseian languages. This fact has led scholars such as Pulleyblank and Vovin to argue that the Xiongnu had a Yeniseian core tribal elite,⁴ which ruled over various Tocharian-Iranian and Altaic (Turco-Mongol) groups. However, whether the Jie tribe and the language they spoke is representative of the core ruling elite of the Xiongnu Empire remains uncertain and other scholars strongly argue in favour of a Turkic,⁵ Mongolic or even Iranian ruling elite.

It seems rather likely that the core language of the Xiongnu was either Turkic or Yeniseian (or maybe even both). However, no definitive conclusions can as yet be made about which linguistic group constituted the upper elite of their empire. The attempt itself may in fact be irrelevant since the Xiongnu were quite clearly a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic hybrid entity. To suggest otherwise would render simply incomprehensible the complexity and heterogeneity of the Xiongnu Empire.

The European Huns were equally as heterogeneous as the Xiongnu of Mongolia. Their core language was very likely to have been Oghuric Turkic given the names of their kings and princes, which are

for the most part Oghuric Turkic in origin as the list below shows:

1. Mundzuk (Attila the Hun's father, from Turkic Munčūq = pearl/jewel)
2. Oktar/Uptar (Attila's uncle, Öktär = brave/powerful)
3. Oebarsius (another of Attila's paternal uncles, Aïbârs = leopard of the moon)
4. Karaton (Hunnic supreme king before Ruga, Qarâton = black-cloak)
5. Basik (Hunnic noble of royal blood early fifth century, Bârsiğ = governor)
6. Kursik (Hunnic noble of royal blood, from either Kürsiğ, meaning brave or noble, or Quršiğ meaning belt-bearer).⁶

Furthermore, all three of Attila's known sons have probable Turkic names: Ellac, Dengizich, Ernakh/Hernak, and Attila's principal wife, the mother of the first son Ellac, has the Turkic name Herekan, as does another wife named Eskam.⁷ The heavy concentration of Turkic peoples in the areas from which the Huns derived before their major expansion into Europe and Central Asia is likely to have led to the consolidation of a Turkic language as the dominant language among the European Huns. A Chinese historical source the *Weilue* (= *Sanguozhi* 30.863–4),⁸ for instance, tells us that the Dingling (an ancient Turkic people) were the main inhabitants of what is now the Kazakh steppes, north of the Kangju people (a group who were situated around the city of Tashkent in what is now modern Uzbekistan) and west of the Wusun people (then situated in eastern Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) by the third century AD.

However, this does not mean that the ethnic composition of the Huns in Central Asia before their entry into Europe in the mid fourth century AD was exclusively Turkic. There was also an important Iranian element within their ethnic mix and this is borne out by the fact that the Central Asian Huns and the Iranian speaking Alans (the first recorded opponents of the Huns during the Hunnic expansion west into Europe in the mid fourth century AD) shared a very similar material culture. Both groups also practised the custom of cranial deformation (the origin of which is obscure). Archaeologically it is often very difficult to make a clear distinction between a Hun, an Alan and later even a Germanic Goth due to the intensity of cultural mixing and acculturation between all the major ethnic groups that comprised the population of the Hun Empire: Oghuric Turkic, Iranian, Germanic, etc. Just as the Xiongnu accommodated Chinese defectors into their empire, the later Huns also provided refuge for Greco-Roman defectors and also forcibly settled Roman prisoners of war in their territory. Priscus, a Roman historian and career diplomat, who visited

the court of Attila the Hun as part of a Roman diplomatic mission to the Huns, leaves us with a vivid image of the heterogeneity of Hunnic society. He tells us that at the Hunnic court Hunnic (presumably Oghuric Turkic), Gothic and Latin were all spoken and all three languages were understood by most of the elite to some degree,⁹ so much so that Zercon the Moor, the court jester, could provoke laughter by jumbling all three languages together at a Hunnic banquet in the presence of Attila.¹⁰ Interestingly the Hunnic Kidarite Empire in Central Asia, which was contemporaneous with Attila's Hunnic Empire in Europe, also used multiple languages. We know for instance that Sogdian, Bactrian, Middle Persian and Brahmi on different occasions were all used for administrative purposes.¹¹

In other words, any attempt to prove a genetic continuity between the Xiongnu and the Huns and any other political successor group to both empires is bound to produce mixed results, since every level of Xiongnu-Hun society was heterogeneous and most likely also multilingual. What matters more is the fact that the Huns of Europe and Central Asia chose to use the name of the imperial Xiongnu as their own ethnonym or state name, which is clearly an indication that they regarded this link with the old steppe, Inner Asian tradition of imperial power and grandeur invaluable and very significant. The preservation of Xiongnu cultural identity (as the preservation of Xiongnu type cauldrons all the way from the eastern steppes to the Danube represents) among the European Huns suggests that the political and cultural heritage of the Xiongnu is the key to understanding the true significance of the connections between the Xiongnu and the Huns, not the supposed racial/genetic connections.

From this point onwards the book will observe consecutively the various Hunnic political groups that changed the history of Eurasia in China, Central Asia, India and Europe. Until now most histories on the Huns have tended to focus almost exclusively on the history of the European Huns alone. However, such an approach fails to illuminate sufficiently the Eurasia-wide geopolitical revolution that was the Hunnic expansion of the fourth and fifth centuries AD. Only by examining all these various Hun groups together can we truly appreciate the enormous changes brought about by the Huns to the Ancient World and by extension to the political and cultural future of the Eurasian World as a whole. These various Hunnic groups were not identical to each other culturally and politically. However, all of them could ultimately claim some form of political lineage from the great Xiongnu/Hun Empire of Inner Asia. They shared an ecumenical Inner Asian political tradition and it was primarily this political tradition that they bequeathed to their respective conquests.

Due to the lack of space available it is not possible to give a detailed

summary of all the relevant primary and secondary sources used and consulted in this book. However, where necessary short explanations will be given to explain the provenance and importance of the most significant primary sources pertaining to the Huns in the individual chapters that follow. [Map 0.1](#) also provides the geographical location of the various regions and peoples affected by the history described in this book. Because of the vast geographical extent of Hunnic Empires in Eurasia the reader will unfortunately encounter a veritable tsunami of unfamiliar proper names associated with the Huns and their conquests throughout this book. As in this introduction, where relevant in the individual chapters, short descriptions of these unfamiliar names will be provided to help the reader navigate his or her way through the deluge.



A	Altai	G	Gansu Corridor	M	Mongolia	Tu	Turpan
AL	Alans	GE	Germania	MA	Manchuria	W	Wusun-Zhetysay-Ili
B	Bactria-Tokharistan	GO	Goths	Me	Merv Oasis	WU	Wuhuan
BA	Balkar region	I	India	P	Persia-Iran	X	Xiongnu-Ordos
CA	Caucasus	K	Kazakh steppes	PU	Punjab	XI	Xianbei
D	Dzungaria	KA	Kangju	R	Roman Empire	Y	Yuezhi homeland
DA	Danubian region	KM	Kashmir	S	Sogdiana-Transoxiana	YE	Yeniseian Peoples
De	Derbent	Ks	Kashgar	SA	Sarmatia	Z	Zhongyuan-China
DI	Dingling (mainly Turkic)	KU	Kuban steppes	SI	Sistan-Sakastan	ZA	Zabulistan
DO	Donghu (Xianbei & Wuhuan)	KW	Khwarezm	T	Tarim Basin		

MAP 0.1 Location of key regions and peoples affected by Hunnic expansion

NOTES

¹ La Vaissière (2005), 11–15.

² Pulleyblank (2000a), 60–1, upon examination of phonetic evidence concludes that there is no alternative but to accept that the European Huns had the same name as the Xiongnu. De Crespigny (1984), 174, agrees. See also Atwood

(2012), 27–52, who via a slightly different interpretation of the available phonetic evidence arrives at the same conclusion, that the Huns are the Xiongnu. See also Wright (1997) and Hill (2009), 73–4, for further information on phonetic and other evidence in favour of Xiongnu-Hun identification.

3 Hambis (1958), 262; Maenchen-Helfen (1973), 330–1; La Vaissière (2005), 17; Bona (1991), 140; Érdy (1995), 5–94.

4 Pulleyblank (1962); (2000a), 62–5; Vovin (2000).

5 Benjamin (2007), 49, who sees the Xiongnu as either Proto-Turks or Proto-Mongols, who spoke a language related to the clearly Turkic Dingling people further west.

6 For all these etymologies see Bona (1991), 33.

7 Maenchen-Helfen (1973), 392–415. See also Bona (1991), 33–5, and Pritsak (1956), 414. Most known Hunnic tribal names are also Turkic, Maenchen-Helfen (1973), 427–41.

8 The *Weilue* was compiled by a certain Yu Huan in the third century AD and contains valuable geographical information about contemporary Inner Asian peoples including the Xiongnu.

9 For the frequent bilingualism among steppe peoples see Golden (2006–7), 19.

10 Priscus, fr. 13.3, Blockley (1983), 289. Iranian, though not mentioned by Priscus, was also certainly spoken in the Empire, possibly as influential as Hunnic or Gothic, especially in the east. The name of the Hunnic leader who in 465/6 raided Dacia Ripensis and Mediterranea, Hormidas, is Iranian, Maenchen-Helfen (1973), 390.

11 Zeimal (1996), 132.

1 THE XIONGNU HUN EMPIRE

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF THE XIONGNU HUNS

Any discussion on the Huns must first begin with the story of the mighty Xiongnu, the original Huns of Inner Asia. The Xiongnu (匈奴) Empire is in many cases called a ‘nomadic’ empire or confederacy. Actually, as we will see later on in this chapter, in the discussion on Xiongnu archaeology, it was in reality an agro-pastoralist society, not purely nomadic.¹ It is hotly debated among scholars whether this ‘nomadic’ Xiongnu constituted a state or simply a super-complex tribal confederacy with imperial dimensions.² Underlying this debate is the assumption among some scholars that ‘nomadism’ is an insurmountable barrier to organized statehood. However, as explained earlier in the introduction, ‘nomadism’ or rather pastoralism by no means implies a lack of fixed boundaries or less organizational capacity. The existence of well-defined territories and regular movements under an authoritative leader was essential for the survival of the ‘nomadic’ tribal community in a very fragile ecological environment.³ Therefore, we must first of all dismiss the erroneous preconception that ‘nomadism’ means political anarchy. What is not at all in dispute is the fact that the political organization of the Xiongnu provided an excellent model on which all subsequent steppe political entities built their ‘confederacies’ or ‘states’.⁴ Therefore, it is worthwhile to examine in some detail the political organization of the Xiongnu, which in all likelihood influenced also the later Hunnic political systems in Central Asia and Europe.

Much of the dispute regarding the nature of Xiongnu political organization arises from the differing understanding among scholars of what actually constitutes a ‘state’ and an ‘empire’. The Russian scholar Kradin has argued that a state should have the following characteristics:

1. access to managerial positions by a form of merit-based, extra-clan and non-kin-based selection;
2. regular taxation to pay wages to officials;
3. a special judicial power separate from political power;
4. a ‘class’ of state functionaries engaged in running a state

machinery consisting of services for the administration of the whole political community.

Each of these criteria is obviously debatable and it is to be wondered whether this definition of the state is too modernist and not nearly as relevant to or appropriate in defining pre-early-modern states. However that may be, Kradin assumes that based on these criteria the Xiongnu achieved 'statehood', at best, merely at an 'embryonic' level and therefore should not be categorized as a state.⁵ A much looser and perhaps more appropriate definition of the state is provided by Krader, who argues that all steppe empires of Eurasia were actually state-level polities.⁶ However, for the sake of clarity it will be examined henceforth whether the Xiongnu by Kradin's definition constituted a state or simply a complex chiefdom.

According to the Chinese source *Shiji* by the renowned historian Sima Qian (a historian of the Chinese Han dynasty (206 BC–220 AD)) the Xiongnu political system was a highly centralized 'autocracy', a complex hierarchy descending from the emperor (called Shanyu/Chanyu) to lesser kings and sub-kings. It was a structure that has been described as essentially 'quasi-feudal'.⁷ Sima Qian writes:

Under the *Shan-yü*⁸ are the Wise Kings of the Left and Right, the left and right Lu-li kings, left and right generals, left and right commandants, left and right household administrators, and left and right Ku-tu marquises. The Hsiung-nu word for 'wise' is 't'u-ch'i', so that the heir of the *Shan-yü* is customarily called the 'T'u-ch'i King of the Left'. Among the other leaders, from the wise kings on down to the household administrators, the more important ones command ten thousand horsemen and the lesser ones several thousand, numbering twenty-four leaders in all, though all are known by the title 'Ten Thousand Horsemen'. The high ministerial offices are hereditary, being filled from generation to generation by the members of the Hu-yen and Lan families, and in more recent times by the Hsü-pu family. These three families constitute the aristocracy of the nation. The kings and other leaders of the left live in the eastern sector, the region from Shang-ku east to the land of the Hui-mo and the Ch'ao-hsien peoples. The kings and leaders of the right live in the west, the area from Shang province west to the territories of the Yüeh-chi and Ch'iang tribes. The *Shan-yü* has his court in the region of Tai and Yün-chung. Each group has its own area, within which it moves about from place to place looking for water and pasture. The Left and Right Wise Kings and the Lu-li kings are the most powerful, while the Ku-tu marquises assist the *Shan-yü* in the administration of the nation. Each of the twenty-four leaders in turn appoint his own 'chiefs of a thousand', 'chiefs of a hundred', and 'chiefs of ten', as well as his subordinate kings, prime ministers, chief commandants, household administrators, *chü-ch'ü* officials and so forth.

(*Shiji* 110: 9b–10b)⁹

What this record shows is that the Xiongnu constructed their administrative system in the following way. The supreme power within the system lay with the emperor, the Shanyu (單于, also sometimes transliterated as Chanyu, but likely to have been

pronounced dān-wà, representing the Xiongnu word darywa in Early Middle Chinese (ancient Chinese used during the Han dynasty and Late Antiquity)).¹⁰ The Shanyu was the recognized head of the central government. The actual administrative tasks within the central government, however, were handled by the so-called gu-du marquesses who also coordinated the affairs of the empire as a whole and managed communications with governors and vassals on behalf of the emperor.

Under the control of this central government were four principal, regional governorships in the east and west (also called the ‘horns’): the Worthy King of the Left and the Luli King of the Left in the east, and the Worthy King of the Right and the Luli King of the Right in the west. Each of these four governorships in turn had its own government bureaucracy¹¹ and the kings, who were usually the sons or brothers of the reigning Shanyu/Chanyu (emperor), were the highest ranking aristocrats in the Xiongnu Empire. Incidentally the practice of four pre-eminent sub-kings ruling under a supreme king is also found among the later Volga Bulgars (Hunnic descendants who established a state in what is now roughly the Tatarstan Republic of the Russian Federation) and also among the Göktürks who succeed the Huns and the Rouran¹² as masters of the eastern steppes.

When we combine Sima Qian’s information with the information we find in a later source the *Hou Hanshu* (recording the history of the second half of the Han dynasty; Sima Qian himself was active in the first half during the first century BC), we learn a little bit more about the upper tier of Xiongnu administrative hierarchy, that there was apparently also a supreme aristocratic council of six top ranking nobles. This council included the so-called ‘Rizhu kings’ of the Left and Right, which were titles originally only given to the sons and younger brothers of the Shanyu (*Hou Hanshu* 79. 2944). However, later as the Xiongnu political system evolved, these titles were transferred to the aristocratic Huyan clan, which was related to the royal family by marriage. The other four nobles making up the council were the Wenyuti kings of the Left and Right, and the Zhanjiang Kings of the Left and Right. The *Hou Hanshu* calls these Lords the six corners or horns. It has been suggested that this hierarchy and the political ranks of aristocratic and ruling clans may have changed somewhat between the time of Sima Qian (earlier Han period) and the later Han period (first–third century AD). By the time of the later Han dynasty the empire of the Xiongnu had splintered into two separate entities, the Northern and Southern Xiongnu. What the *Hou Hanshu* describes therefore (about the six horn nobles, etc.) may be a reference to political innovation among the Southern Xiongnu (who were allied to the Chinese) rather than the exact old Xiongnu system of governance.

However, it is clear that these later developments, if they were of any significance, in any case derived from the political traditions of the original Xiongnu Empire or it may simply be that the Han Chinese had a better understanding of the Xiongnu political system by this time and elaborated on the original description of Xiongnu political organization left in the *Shiji* by Sima Qian.¹³

Below these ten top-ranking nobles (or including these ten) there were the 24 imperial leaders/ministers (each titled Ten Thousand Horsemen), who seem to have been the imperial governors of the key, major provinces of the Xiongnu Empire. These lords again consisted of the close relatives of the Shanyu/Chanyu or members of the Xiongnu aristocracy that were related to the royal house. These senior nobles were divided into eastern and western groups in a dual system and the designated successor to the Xiongnu imperial throne was usually appointed the Wise King of the Left, who was the titular ruler of the eastern half of the political unit. All political appointments were tightly controlled by the reigning emperor (the Shanyu) in order to strengthen the power of the central government vis-à-vis the provinces and the periphery.

At the bottom of this complex administrative hierarchy was a large group of subordinate or vassal tribal leaders (labelled in the *Shiji* sub-kings, prime ministers, chief commandants, household administrators, *chü-ch'ü* officials etc.). These officials were under the control of the 24 imperial governors, but at times enjoyed a level of local autonomy.¹⁴ Some former rulers of conquered peoples were also allowed to remain sub-kings/chiefs under appropriate Xiongnu oversight and over-kings. For the government of the more distant western parts of their territory the Xiongnu created the office curiously titled the 'Commandant in charge of Slaves', which under the overlordship of a Xiongnu sub-king had the power to tax minor states such as Karashar and Kalmagan (in what is now Xinjiang province in western China) and to conscript corvée labour. In addition certain Chinese defectors were also appointed sub-kings, e.g. Wei Lu as king of the Ding Ling people and Lu Wan as king of the Donghu people. However, the upper echelons of power and positions of political, administrative and military importance close to the Shanyu/Chanyu and key strategic areas were almost exclusively reserved for members of the imperial clan and a few select Xiongnu aristocratic families.

A non-decimal system of ranks was used for the political administration of tribes and territory within the empire during peacetime and these included groups of many different sizes. However, a tighter system of decimal ranks (thousands, hundreds, tens, etc.) was used in wartime when large-scale armies were formed from troops conscripted from different parts of the empire under a

single command structure.¹⁵ A census was also taken to determine the empire's reserve of manpower and livestock.¹⁶ Chinese sources report that Modu, the first pre-eminent Shanyu/Chanyu, had annexed some 26 states north and west of China and had reduced them all to complete obedience as constituent parts of the Xiongnu nation. In war the Shanyu could reputedly mobilize an army of 140,000 men from among his subjects.¹⁷

What all this shows is that Kradin's reluctance to define the Xiongnu as a state is quite unwarranted. As Di Cosmo points out the Xiongnu Empire even by Kradin's rigid definition was much more similar to a well-organized state than a loosely controlled chiefdom. The Xiongnu administration possessed distinct military and civilian apparatuses separate from kin-based hierarchies. Top commanders and functionaries received their wages (in various forms) from a political centre headed by the Xiongnu emperor (Shanyu/Chanyu), who was also in charge of ceremonies and rituals that were meant to include the entire political community, not just his kin group. The incredibly complex organization of Xiongnu armies, its imperial rituals, government structure and politically centralized functions of trade and diplomacy all bear witness to what Di Cosmo calls a political machinery and supratribal, imperial ideology.¹⁸ Kradin himself concedes that special judicial manpower (i.e. judges) was also available in the Xiongnu Empire and that there were special state functionaries (gu-du marquesses) who assisted the emperor in the overall administration of the empire.¹⁹ Therefore, the Xiongnu Empire can in all probability be defined as a state or an 'early state' entity.²⁰

Also, there can be absolutely no doubt at all that the Xiongnu constituted an empire,

a political formation that extended far beyond its original territorial or ethnic confines and embraced, by direct conquest or by the imposition of its political authority, a variety of peoples and lands that may have had different types of relations with the imperial center, constituted by an imperial clan and by its charismatic leader.²¹

On this point the vast majority of Xiongnu experts, including Kradin are in full agreement.

Another important aspect of Xiongnu political organization is the degree to which the Xiongnu absorbed and adapted neighbouring Chinese practices with regard to their state organization and administration. The putative Chinese influence on the Xiongnu is rejected by some scholars who see the resemblances and similarities between Xiongnu and Chinese administrative and cultural practices to be largely the result of a shared set of associations that may go back to a more ancient cultural stratum.²² However, the essentially quasi-feudal character of the Xiongnu Empire with its complex hierarchy of

kings and marquesses, the highest ranks of which were reserved exclusively for members of the royal clan and the lesser ranks for leaders of other leading clans that intermarried with the royal clan,²³ shows striking similarities to the distribution of kingdoms and marquises within the Han imperial system, but with obviously clear differences in functions. The Xiongnu territorial divisions which favoured the left, i.e. the east (when viewed with orientation towards the south in the Chinese manner or right when viewed with orientation towards the north in the steppe manner) over the west may conceivably reflect the influence of Chinese ideas which identified the left (east) with the *yang* (as in *yinyang*) forces of generation and growth. The use of colours as symbolism for territory, blue for east, white for west, black for north and red for south, also correspond to the symbolism of Chinese cosmology (Wuxing, five elements theory).²⁴

One last factor which we must take note of before we leave behind the question of Xiongnu political organization is its connections with earlier forms of political organization in the Eurasian steppes. There have long been suggestions that the Scythians/Saka in the western steppes, an Iranian speaking people who flourished between the eighth and fourth centuries BC, had a cultural impact on the Xiongnu.²⁵ There is also some evidence of similarities/affinities between the political systems of the two groups as well. The fifth century Greek historian Herodotus recounts a Scythian legend in which the principal components of the Scythian polity are divided into three parts (Hdt. 4.7). This is strikingly similar to the tripartite division of power among the leading tribes/clans, which characterized the Xiongnu form of government. The Xiongnu system featured three aristocratic clans linked via family/marriage ties to the Shanyu/Chanyu: the Huyan, Lan and Xubu (the imperial clan was the Xulianti/Luanti clan which descended from the early Shanyus Tuman and Modu), which constituted the ruling, upper class of Xiongnu society. These ruling clans, along with the royal family, led separate sub-divisions of steppe peoples²⁶ in ways reminiscent of the three Scythian divisions.

Just as the Xiongnu had a ruling Xulianti clan, the Scythians were also headed by the so-called Royal Scythians who held supremacy over all other groups of Scythians. The taking of the census by the Scythian king Ariantes, reported by Herodotus (4.81), also shows that there were already steppe models of taxation and labour exploitation available for the Xiongnu to adapt to their purposes without even needing to seek out Chinese alternatives. The proximity of these Scythians/Saka to the Xiongnu is also worth considering. According to archaeological excavations from Arzhan in Tuva, northwest of

Mongolia (the core territory of the Xiongnu), remains dating from the Scythian period (eighth century BC) have revealed the existence of highly organized steppe polities in Central Asia that corroborate Herodotus' observations. A large-scale Scythian/Saka type tomb that consisted of 70 chambers and contained 160 saddle horses buried together with a Saka king demonstrates the existence of a well-organized steppe confederacy under the rule of a powerful monarch, long before the rise of the Xiongnu Empire. That this Saka king ruled over a more or less typical steppe hierarchical state or quasi-state entity is confirmed by the fact that subordinate princes or nobles were buried to the north, south and west of the king and his wife.²⁷ The roots of complex political organization in the steppes are therefore revealed to have been truly ancient. The Xiongnu and the later Huns did not arise out of nothing.

In the western parts of the Eurasian steppes (today's Ukraine and southern Russia), after the demise of the Scythians, the Scythian political tradition was continued by the largely Iranian language speaking Sarmatians and Alans (considered a sub-branch of the Sarmatians).²⁸ In comparison with the contemporaneous Xiongnu however, these western counterparts of the Xiongnu were somewhat more fragmented and poorly organized. According to Strabo (a Greco-Roman geographer from the late first century BC to early first century AD), before they became fragmented, the Sarmatians possessed a more centralized organization. He reports the existence of a ruling royal tribe which was situated in the centre of the Sarmatian tribal confederacy/empire that had around it a protective ring of vassal tribes (Iazyges to the south, Urgi to the north and the Roxolani to the east).²⁹

The Alans further to the east, like the more westerly Sarmatians in the second century BC, also possessed a royal clan and regiments of professional warriors in the Scythian manner (presumably in the usual decimal system).³⁰ In their heydays Strabo would report that King Spadinus of the Aorsi (probably the Alans or a group later linked to the Alans) could marshal an army of 200,000 men (Strabo 11.5.8). A gross exaggeration without doubt, but nonetheless highlighting the power of these steppe peoples. The kings of the Alans, like the Scythian king Ariantes of old, carried out a general census of male warriors. An inscription discovered at Olbia also bears witness to their observance of the steppe custom of collective or joint rule among brothers who are referred to as the 'greatest kings of Aorsia'.³¹ Furthermore, the Alans seem to have possessed a ranking system in much the same way as the earlier Scythians and the contemporaneous Xiongnu. The Alans also used colour to designate segments of their tribal confederation in much the same way as the Xiongnu. Thus we

China, who are collectively called the *Rongdi* (western and northern ‘barbarians’). A group called the Quanrong (literally ‘dog martial people’) in particular, who Sima Qian seems to identify with the early Xiongnu, are said to have been responsible for the capture of the Chinese Western Zhou (ca. 1046–771 BC, the then ruling dynasty of the Zhongyuan (the central plains that later became the core of the Chinese Empire)) capital of Haojing around 770 BC. This catastrophe forced the Chinese to abandon their western territories and flee east.

The forebears of the Xiongnu Huns, according to Sima Qian, continued to menace China for centuries until the Chinese eventually got the better of them. The Xiongnu Huns were expelled from their homeland in the Ordos region (modern Inner Mongolia in northern China) by the First Emperor of China, Qin Shi Huangdi, the infamously cruel tyrant who unified China in 221 BC. Qin Shi Huangdi erected the famous Great Wall in order to ward off *Hu* (nomadic barbarian) invaders from the north and to secure his own territories. Tens of thousands of labourers are said to have perished in order to build the wall. However, the glory of Qin (the state-name from which the modern name China is thought to derive) turned out to be short-lived. The dynasty collapsed in the midst of chaotic rebellion and China descended into a period of anarchy.

The Xiongnu under their king Touman (the first Xiongnu ruler whose name appears in the historical record) were able to capitalize on this disorder to make a comeback and reoccupy the Ordos region. At this stage the Xiongnu Huns were only one among many steppe confederacies competing with each other for dominance in the eastern steppes. They were sandwiched between two more powerful Inner Asian steppe peoples: the proto-Mongolic Donghu to the east and the Indo-European Yuezhi to the west.

It is in this historical context that the first great conqueror of steppe history emerged onto the annals of Inner Asian history. Modu Chanyu (Shanyu), whose name according to the Early Middle Chinese reading would have approximated the common Turco-Mongol name or title Bagatur (hero), was born as the eldest son of the Xiongnu Shanyu/Chanyu Touman. According to the legend of his rise to power related in Sima Qian’s *Shiji*, Modu was the unwanted son of a former wife whom Touman, the Xiongnu king, wished to dispose of in order to secure the succession for his favourite son by another wife. The evil father (or maybe uncle given the possibility of collateral succession to the throne among the Xiongnu and other Inner Asian peoples) is said to have plotted the death of the young hero, sending him as a hostage to the neighbouring Yuezhi and then starting a war with the Yuezhi in order to provoke the Yuezhi to slay the unwanted son.

However, Modu’s destiny was to survive and become the first ruler

of a unified Inner Asian world. He escaped the trap set by his sinister father by stealing a horse from the Yuezhi and made his way back to the Xiongnu. Touman was forced to recognize his son's bravery and he appointed Modu the general of 10,000 horsemen. Modu immediately proceeded to secure his position by gaining the absolute obedience of his men. He instructed his men to all shoot their arrows at targets he would set for them and executed anyone who dared to disobey. The targets progressively became more provocative: Modu's favourite horse, his favourite wife, then the horse of his father, the reigning Chanyu. After securing the absolute fidelity of his men through drastic measures, Modu carried out a merciless coup and assassinated his father by subjecting him to a hail of arrows from his disciplined troops.

This was only the beginning of Modu's reign of terror. He then ordered the execution of his half-brothers, step-mother and any members of the Xiongnu aristocracy who opposed him. The brutal purge was then followed by an encounter with the formidable Donghu confederacy to the east. The Donghu in order to test the ability of the new Chanyu sent an ambassador to Modu demanding that the Xiongnu hand over the late Touman's great warhorse. All the Xiongnu nobles begged Modu to reject the impertinent request, but to everyone's surprise the indomitable Modu gave up the horse described as the 'treasure' of the Xiongnu to the Donghu without a second thought. The Donghu became even more insolent and demanded that Modu surrender one of his wives to them. Again Modu complied against the protests of his nobles who wanted to resist.

The Donghu were by now contemptuous of the Xiongnu Chanyu and without organizing any proper defences they went on to demand from the Xiongnu the barren wasteland between them and the Xiongnu nation. The Xiongnu nobles who had earlier seen their king give up the great horse and favourite woman without resistance thought that giving up some useless land would not be a big deal and advised Modu to comply with the Donghu request as before. At this Modu suddenly flew into a rage. Horses and women can be sacrificed for peace, but land is the foundation of the state he declared. He immediately ordered the execution of all the officials who had advised the surrender of territory and swiftly launched an all-out war against the unsuspecting Donghu. The Donghu who had been fooled by Modu's deception were overwhelmed and incorporated into the Xiongnu Empire.

Modu followed up this victory by defeating also the powerful Yuezhi to the west. Victory followed victory and the Xiongnu Huns went on to recover all the territory in the south that they had lost to the Chinese under the Qin dynasty. In the north Modu campaigned

successfully against tribes such as the Hunyu and the Dingling. For the first time in history all of eastern Inner Asia was united under the banner of a single imperial state. Sima Qian notes that the Xiongnu lords and officials realized that Modu was wise and capable and rendered him complete obedience. The standing army of the Xiongnu also expanded to 300,000 men, a match for the mighty armies of Han China.

Modu then achieved his greatest triumph in 200 BC at Ping Cheng where he defeated and surrounded the army of Emperor Gaozu of the recently established Han dynasty of China. Gaozu had to buy his freedom by submitting to humiliating terms. He was forced to surrender one of his daughters as the concubine of the Xiongnu Chanyu (Gaozu sent a relative instead after lying to the Xiongnu that the girl was indeed his daughter). The Han Chinese agreed to pay an annual tribute consisting of silk, wine, grain and other foodstuffs to the Chanyu as well to placate this powerful northern adversary. Han China had in effect become a tributary state dependent on the good will of the Xiongnu Empire. When Gaozu died Modu sent an insulting letter to the empress dowager of Han China, suggesting that she become one of his wives. The Empress reacted with anger and asked her officials if a punitive expedition could be launched against the Xiongnu. To this belligerent talk Han officials replied that not even the wise and martial Gaozu could defeat the Xiongnu, but suffered the humiliating debacle at Ping Cheng. The empress relented and sent a humble letter to the Chanyu asking for the latter's indulgence, explaining to him that she was unfit to be the wife of the Chanyu due to old age and deteriorating physical condition. To wrap up she reminded the Chanyu that her country had done nothing wrong and begged the Xiongnu emperor to spare it (*Han Shu*, 94A: 5a).³³

During the early years of the subsequent reign of China's Han Wendi (179–57 BC) Modu again scored a decisive victory over the Yuezhi and conquered the Tarim basin (modern Xinjiang) and a total of 26 nations to the west including the powerful Wusun nation (eastern Kazakhstan). Wendi decided that the Xiongnu were too formidable to provoke and renewed the payment of tribute paid during the times of Emperor Gaozu and Empress Dowager Lu. The tribute was in fact increased to 1,000 pieces of gold a year (*Han Shu*, 94B:12b). Modu died in 174 BC and was able to pass on the imperial throne to his son Laoshang without any political disturbance. Such was his influence and authority over the Xiongnu.

In a remarkable reign that lasted 35 years the great Modu Chanyu founded the Xiongnu Empire, reorganized the system of governance of the Xiongnu and greatly expanded the boundaries of the state so that it was now larger than the famous empire of Alexander the Great.

Modu had also subjected an equally large empire of China to the payment of tribute. Modu was in many ways Alexander's equal, maybe even superior when it comes to the extent of his conquests. The two rulers were also similar in that they were both suspected of having assassinated their fathers (Touman and Philip) in order to seize the throne. Modu, however, was clearly the more competent politician and administrator of the two. While Alexander's empire collapsed and splintered right after his death, Modu's Hunnic Xiongnu Empire would last a further 400 years under the rule of Modu's direct descendants. Alexander's death not only led to the end of his empire, but also the extinction of his royal house.

After Modu's death his legacy was inherited by his chosen heir the new Chanyu Laoshang. Under Laoshang the Xiongnu defeated the Yuezhi once again in 162 BC and turned the skull of the defeated Yuezhi king into a drinking cup (*Shiji* 123.3162). The Yuezhi who had already been pushed as far west as the Zhetysay region (in modern eastern Kazakhstan) now had to flee even further west into Greco-Bactrian territory. The Greco-Bactrians were the successors of Alexander's Greeks and Macedonians in modern Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. The newly conquered lands in modern Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were awarded by the Xiongnu emperor to the Wusun people who had rendered valuable service to the Xiongnu in the latest war against the Yuezhi. The Chinese to the south of the Xiongnu Empire remained in awe of the power of the Xiongnu and for nearly 70 years until 134 BC the Han Chinese paid regular tribute to first Modu, then Laoshang and finally to Gunchen Chanyu.

However, the accession of the more militant Emperor Wu (the 'martial' emperor) to the Han throne in 141 AD brought about a revision of the so-called *heqin* (appeasement) policy towards the Xiongnu by the Chinese. Emperor Wu authorized a plan in 134 BC to lure Gunchen Chanyu and the Xiongnu army into a Han ambush. The plan failed, however, and five years later in 129 BC full-scale war erupted between the Xiongnu and the Han Empire. Somewhat remarkably during this war the Han Chinese forces for the first time held their own against the powerful Xiongnu mobile armies and even managed to inflict defeats (usually pyrrhic and costly) on individual Xiongnu armies. The Han Chinese endeavour to take back lost territory from the Xiongnu and also to expand west was aided by the first major political disturbance since Modu within the Xiongnu system. Gunchen Chanyu died in 126 BC in the early stages of the war between the Xiongnu Huns and Han China. After Gunchen's death, his brother Ichise usurped the throne from Gunchen's heir, the wise king of the left Yui Bi.

Yui Bi, facing defeat at the hands of Ichise, surrendered to the Han

and Wudi took full advantage of this civil strife among the Xiongnu by reoccupying the Ordos region which Touman Chanyu almost a century earlier had reconquered for the Xiongnu. The usurpation of Ichise Chanyu had other repercussions. Xiongnu sub-kings in the Gansu region (part of western China) after being defeated by invading Han armies chose to defect to Han China rather than face punishment at the hands of the vengeful Ichise Chanyu. The defection of key Xiongnu lords shows that there were rifts among the Xiongnu aristocracy, the cause of which was clearly Ichise's illegal usurpation of the throne. The two empires continued to battle one another for the next half a century until 60 BC when the Han routed the Xiongnu and secured complete, albeit temporary, control over all of the Tarim basin (modern day Xinjiang). The defeats suffered by the Xiongnu during the long war also triggered rebellion against the Xiongnu by former vassal peoples such as the Wusun. In 72 BC the Wusun mounted a devastatingly successful raid against the Xiongnu from the west. In the following year in 71 BC formerly vassal peoples to the north the Dingling and the Wuhuan to the east joined together with the Wusun in assaulting the Xiongnu from all sides.

The breakdown of Xiongnu control over vassal peoples was also partly due to a leadership crisis in the central Xiongnu government and the growth of regionalism within the empire. Between 114 BC and 58 BC the Xiongnu enthroned a total of eight short-lived Chanyus, of which only two reigned for more than ten years. Factional conflict at court, sometimes triggered by regional power struggles, undermined the ability of the Xiongnu central government to effectively quell internal rebellions and beat off Han invasions from the south. The principle of primogeniture among the early Xiongnu Chanyus which saw the imperial throne pass from father to son, an indication of the overwhelming authority held by the reigning Chanyu and a distinct oddity in steppe societies, increasingly became incompatible with the usual steppe practice of tanistry and collateral succession to the throne. By 57 BC the strife over the imperial succession produced five regional contenders, all vying for the title of Chanyu.

By 54 BC just two of the five contenders were left in place, Zhizhi in the north and Huhanye in the south. Huhanye was hard pressed by Zhizhi and in order to improve his chances of success, he decided to do the unthinkable: submit to the Han Empire and agree to become a vassal of the Chinese emperor. Thus, in a full reversal of the situation earlier in history where the Han emperor was a virtual vassal of the Xiongnu Chanyu, the Xiongnu ruler now accepted secondary status below that of the Han emperor. Huhanye paid homage to the Han emperor in Changan, the Chinese capital, and for this act of subservience he was given Han money and military support against

the defiant Zhizhi. By 36 BC Huhanye with a combined force of Xiongnu and Han troops managed to defeat Zhizhi completely. Zhizhi's supporters followed their defeated lord all the way to Uzbekistan (the land of the Kangju people) in the west where Zhizhi met his tragic end.

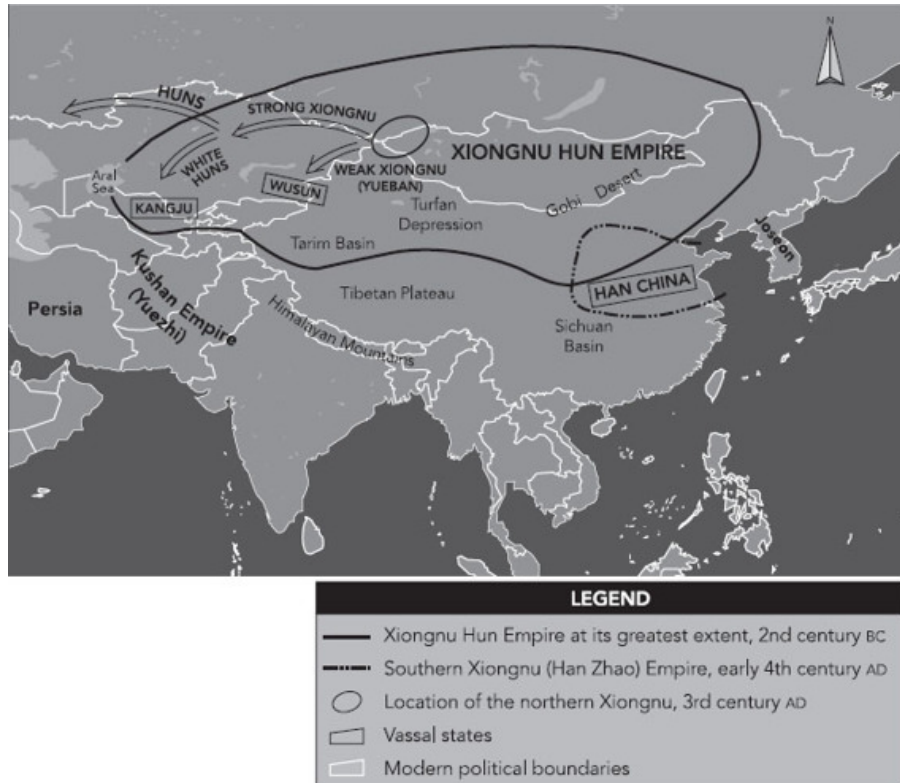
The humiliation of the Xiongnu Huns, however, would not last indefinitely. Just 40 years after the humiliating reign of Huhanye the Han dynasty was displaced by the short-lived Xin dynasty of the usurper Wang Mang. A Han restoration movement began almost immediately and China descended into civil war. The Xiongnu took full advantage and restored their rule over rebellious vassal peoples such as the Wuhuan in the east and recaptured lost territories in the west, most notably the Tarim basin. The resurgent Xiongnu demanded from the Han treatment that they had enjoyed under Modu and declared triumphantly that the tributary relationship between the Han and Xiongnu should now be reversed again with the Chanyu as the superior of the Han Chinese emperor.

Unfortunately for the Xiongnu Huns, at this juncture in their long history, frictions within the Xiongnu elite were reaching levels that soon tore apart the empire into two halves. In 46 AD Punu was declared the Chanyu of the empire in the north, but in the south eight breakaway tribes and their nobility proclaimed another pretender Bi as the Chanyu, who like Huhanye before him sought Chinese aid to counter his northern rival. This time the division of the Xiongnu into northern and southern groups would be permanent. In 50 AD Bi sent his son to Luoyang, the new Chinese capital of the restored Han dynasty, as a sign of Xiongnu submission to the Han Empire. His group of Southern Xiongnu actually entered Chinese territory and became federates of the Chinese along the imperial border between Han China and the Xiongnu, much like the Germanic Franks along the borders of the Western Roman Empire in the early years of the fifth century AD, whom we will encounter later on in the book. The Southern Xiongnu descendants within China, who tenaciously held on to their Xiongnu identity, would have a glorious future ahead of them.

However, their cousins the Northern Xiongnu in the traditional centre of the Xiongnu Empire in Mongolia proper were facing insurmountable problems. Inner Mongolia to the south was permanently lost to the Southern Xiongnu who had Chinese support. In 73–4 AD the Chinese snatched the Tarim basin and other western territories away from the Northern Xiongnu as well. The Dingling in the north again rose up in rebellion. The rise of the Mongolic Xianbei to the east, however, proved to be the greatest threat. The Xianbei (in Early Middle Chinese pronounced Serbi) were former vassals of the Xiongnu, but now they allied themselves with the Chinese against

their former masters. In 87 AD the Xianbei inflicted a massive defeat on the Northern Xiongnu, killed the reigning Chanyu and flayed his body. Fifty-eight Xiongnu tribes then deserted to the Han Empire.

Further disasters then befell the beleaguered Northern Xiongnu in 89 AD when the Chinese general Dou Xian defeated the Chanyu in Mongolia and killed 13,000 Xiongnu soldiers along with many high-ranking nobles. Some 81 Xiongnu tribes consisting of 200,000 people are said to have surrendered to the Han on that occasion. Just two years later in 91 AD another crippling defeat in the southern range of the Altai mountains virtually ended the Xiongnu Empire and its control over Mongolia and the Tarim basin. The last known Chanyu of the Northern Xiongnu in Chinese records is said to have retreated in the direction of the Ili basin in eastern Kazakhstan. This was by no means the end of the Xiongnu in Inner Asia and the Xiongnu would remain in the Altai region (an area in the very heart of Inner Asia, currently divided between Mongolia, China, Kazakhstan and Russia) until the middle of the third century AD when they are again mentioned by a Chinese source, the *Weilue*. However, their hegemony over Mongolia and the eastern steppes was now taken over by the Xianbei. For two centuries the Xiongnu Huns of the Altai would remain in a state of virtual siege with the Turkic Dingling to the northeast and northwest, Kangju to the west, Xianbei to the east and Wusun to the southwest. Only after this long period of relative obscurity would they re-emerge as the mighty Huns in the annals of history.



MAP 1.1 Xiongnu Hun Empire

SOUTHERN XIONGNU AND XIANBEI CONQUEST OF CHINA

After the collapse of the Xiongnu Empire in 91 AD the paramount position of the Xiongnu Huns in the eastern steppes was taken over by the Xianbei. These Xianbei, however, in large part failed to replicate the success of the Xiongnu in unifying all the tribes of the eastern steppes into a supratribal proto-state entity.³⁴ Only briefly under the charismatic leadership of the remarkable Tanshihuai (141–81 AD) did the Xianbei achieve the imperial scope of the Xiongnu. Tanshihuai defeated the Dingling to the north, Buyeo to the east, the Wusun to the west and checked the Han Chinese to the south, thereby almost recreating the Xiongnu Empire at its height. After his death the Xianbei Empire again fragmented into lesser hordes, but these Xianbei remained strong enough to prevent any comeback by either the Southern or Northern Xiongnu and presented a persistent menace to China's northern borders.

TABLE 1.2 Xiongnu Chanyus and key events in Xiongnu history

1. Touman (ca. 240–209 BC)
 2. Modu (Bagatur, 209–174 BC)
 3. Laoshang (174–161 BC)
 4. Gunchen (161–126 BC)
 5. Ichise ('usurped' the throne from Yui Bi, reigned 126–114 BC)
 6. Eight short-lived Chanyus (114–58 BC, Xiongnu system in decline)
 7. Xiongnu civil war, five contending Chanyus
 8. Zhizhi (55–36 BC, in the north); Huhanye (58–31 BC, in the south, the eventual victor with Chinese support)
 9. Seven Chanyus (31 BC–46 AD)
 10. Break-up of the Xiongnu Empire into the Northern Xiongnu under Punu and Southern Xiongnu under Bi
 11. Last recorded Northern Xiongnu Chanyu reigned ca. 94–118 AD
 12. The Xiongnu Empire disintegrates, Northern Xiongnu reside mainly in the Altai region until the fourth century AD, Southern Xiongnu dwell in the Ordos region in Chinese territory
-

The Southern Xiongnu, hemmed in between the Xianbei-Wuhuan tribes to the north and east and the Chinese Empire to the south, could do little to expand their influence in the second century AD. However, the situation started to change in the third century AD. In the first half of the third century AD the Han Empire splintered into three warring kingdoms and general anarchy prevailed in much of the northern outlying provinces of China. The Southern Xiongnu were growing in size and influence and this drew the attention of Cao Cao, the military dictator who founded the new Wei dynasty in northern China. In order to keep the Xiongnu in line Cao Cao in 216 AD had the Southern Xiongnu Chanyu remain in the Chinese capital as a hostage while the Chanyu's brother the Wise King of the Right was given the task of ruling the Xiongnu in the Chanyu's absence. The Southern Xiongnu were furthermore split into five divisions, each with its own leader and a corresponding Chinese overseer.

The fact that the imperial organization of the Southern Xiongnu remained intact and was still functioning despite the Xiongnu's long sojourn in Chinese border territory was troubling to the Chinese authorities. The measures mentioned above were taken to suppress the Xiongnu's capacity for independent action and also to easily tap into Xiongnu manpower for Cao Wei's wars within China. The Wei dynasty of the Cao family was soon replaced by the Jin dynasty of the Sima clan that proceeded to reunify all of China by the middle of the third century AD. However, the policy of keeping the Xiongnu Chanyu as hostage in Luoyang proved to be ineffective and the humiliating treatment given to the Xiongnu by the Chinese antagonized the

Xiongnu Huns beyond endurance and set the stage for a terrible revenge in the early years of the following fourth century AD. A series of internal civil wars seriously weakened the cohesion of the Jin Chinese Empire from 292 AD onwards and the Xiongnu took this opportunity to finally throw off the Chinese yoke and take charge.

In 304 AD the Southern Xiongnu under Liu Yuan, a direct descendant of Modu Chanyu, declared their independence from the Chinese and the new Great Chanyu, who in his early years had lived as a hostage at the Jin Chinese court and was familiar with Chinese practices, declared that he was not only the ruler of the Xiongnu, but also the legitimate successor of the old Han dynasty of China (by virtue of his descent from imperial Han princesses, hence his use of the surname Liu, the surname of Han emperors). In 308 AD with over 50,000 Xiongnu troops behind him Liu Yuan declared himself emperor of China and thus began the period of the 'sixteen kingdoms' of the *Wuhu* (the five barbarian peoples) when a unique synthesis of steppe, Inner Asian political traditions and Chinese administrative practices occurred to produce what later became the imperial system of the medieval Sui-Tang Empires of China.

Liu Yuan through his military and political talents gradually gained the support of not just his core Xiongnu, but also 'barbarian' lords such as Shi Le of the Jie (a tribe so closely connected with the Xiongnu that they were often considered to be Xiongnu) and Chinese renegade warlords such as Wang Mi. Through these vassals and his nephew and eventual successor Liu Cong, Liu Yuan gained control of much of modern day Shanxi province and launched repeated attacks on the Jin Chinese capital of Luoyang. He died just a year before the final triumph of the Southern Xiongnu over Jin China. Upon his death in 310 AD his son Liu He ascended the throne for just a week before being toppled by Liu Cong. Liu Cong, after seizing the Xiongnu throne by force of arms, continued the assault on Luoyang, which finally fell to the Xiongnu in 311 AD. The Jin Emperor Huai was taken prisoner, the Chinese capital burnt to the ground and Liu Cong granted the defeated Chinese ruler the title of Duke of Kuaiji. The fall of the Chinese Empire was complete and the Xiongnu took revenge for nearly two centuries of humiliation at the hands of the Chinese.

Five years after the fall of Luoyang the Xiongnu took Changan, the second capital of the Jin dynasty, in 316 AD and captured a second Jin Chinese emperor who was given the insulting rank of marquess before being disposed of like the former Jin emperor captured in 311 AD. Both Jin emperors were subjected to the indignity of having to serve the Xiongnu emperor as butlers before their eventual execution. Jin remnants fled south to the Yangtze region and established there the so-called Eastern Jin state in exile. With the exception of Gansu

province in the west controlled by the state of Liang and the Xianbei controlled areas in the northeast, all of northern China from eastern Gansu to Shandong province was now under the rule of the Xiongnu. Liu Cong died in 318 AD having achieved what no other Xiongnu Chanyu had achieved before him, the actual conquest of China.

The Xiongnu Empire in northern China was however highly unstable, mainly because of the bitter internal feuds within the Xiongnu ruling elite. Liu Cong was succeeded by his son Liu Can. Liu Can, however, was almost immediately assassinated by his own father-in-law the general Jin Zhun, who also massacred most members of the imperial clan. Liu Yao, a cousin of the assassinated Xiongnu emperor, recovered the throne for the imperial clan with the support of the Jie warlord Shi Le in the same year. The clan of Jin Zhun and its supporters who had committed the treason were put to the sword. Order was then restored. However, the Xiongnu state began to falter after this internal bloodbath.

Liu Yao moved the Xiongnu capital south to Changan and in 319 AD also changed the Chinese name of the state from Han to Zhao, presumably in some way to stress the Xiongnu origins of the dynasty rather than its connections to the Han dynasty of China. However, the recent purges at the Xiongnu court had weakened the control of the Xiongnu central government. Shi Le of the Jie tribe began to carve out a separate Xiongnu-Jie state in the east and soon declared himself the independent ruler of the Later Zhao state. In 329 AD Shi Le and Liu Yao engaged each other in a decisive battle for control of northern China. Liu Yao was defeated and the Jie tribe of the Shi Clan, probably a former western subject tribe of the Xiongnu confederation (whose physical features were notably more Caucasian in contrast to the presumably Mongoloid core Xiongnu Hun and Chinese inhabitants of the Southern Xiongnu Empire), took charge.

Shi Le and his Jie tribe were noticeably different from other Xiongnu both in their outward appearance and also in their approach to governing the conquered Chinese population. The Xiongnu Liu clan understood Chinese ways and sought to preserve the native population relatively intact. Shi Le and the Jie, if we are to believe the hostile records left about them, were notorious for their arbitrary rule, neglect of administrative concerns and most of all cruelty. The name of Shi Le's distant nephew Shi Hu (who reigned from 334–49 AD) became a byword for barbarian brutality and sadistic behaviour. Reading the records of his reign (if they are even remotely accurate) resembles reading through a grotesque horror novel with the deeds of Vlad Dracula seeming mild in comparison. Such atrocious tyranny could not last indefinitely and a Chinese counter-reaction came in the person of Ran Min, somewhat ironically a native Chinese adopted into

the Shi ruling clan. Upon seizing power in 349 AD he organized a genocide against all *Hu* (barbarians) living in China, especially those of Jie ethnicity. It is alleged that nearly 200,000 barbarians (i.e. non-Chinese) were massacred regardless of sex, age or nationality. In particular people with high noses and full beards were singled out for massacre because those features were regarded to be the indicator of Jie ethnicity. Many native Chinese with those features were also consequently butchered together with the real Jie.

In 350 AD Ran Min declared himself the ruler of the new Wei state and ended the half a century of Xiongnu rule in northern China.³⁵ Shi Zhi the last ruler of the Later Zhao resisted Ran Min until the following year, but Shi Zhi was assassinated by his general Liu Xian in 351 AD. The former lands of the Xiongnu in northern China were then rapidly absorbed by the Xianbei state of Former Yan headed by the Murong clan and the Di state of Former Qin.³⁶ The Xiongnu who survived the massacres of Ran Min fled north back to their original homeland in Inner Mongolia or submitted to the Xianbei and Di.

However, the story of the Huns in China does not end here. Liu Weichen, the leader of the remaining Xiongnu in northern China, became an important vassal of the Di emperor Fu Jian and when the Former Qin Empire of Fu Jian, who had temporarily unified northern China, fell into ruin in the 380s AD Liu Weichen became ruler of a de facto independent Xiongnu kingdom in Inner Mongolia south of the Yellow River. His nascent state, however, was attacked and vanquished by King Tuoba Gui of the Xianbei. Only his son Liu Bobo (381–425 AD) escaped the general massacre of the Xiongnu ruling house carried out by Tuoba Gui. Opportunity for redemption came to Liu Bobo in 407 AD when he was given a military command by the Qiang ruler Yao Xing of Later Qin (a Sino-Tibetan dynasty centred around Changan). When Later Qin made peace with the Tuoba Xianbei who had killed his father, Liu Bobo broke with Later Qin and set up his own state called Xia in the Ningxia region (near Ordos, the traditional homeland of the Huns), declaring himself Tian Wang, the heavenly king.

Liu Bobo, who subsequently changed his surname to the more Xiongnu sounding Helian, was noted for being an extremely cruel and vicious ruler who betrayed all the people who had ever done him any favours. However, this negative representation could in some way be explained by the anti-Helian and anti-Xiongnu propaganda of his arch-enemies the Tuoba Xianbei who eventually came to rule northern China after Helian Bobo's death. In 415 AD Helian Bobo became allies with the Juqu clan who ruled the state of Northern Liang in Gansu province to the west. The Juqu clan, like Helian Bobo, were Xiongnu in origin and the alliance between the two Xiongnu states in northern

China was perhaps only natural. In 417 AD Helian Bobo seized the imperial city of Changan from the Chinese Eastern Jin dynasty, thereby repeating the feat of his ancestors a hundred years earlier in 316 AD. Having captured Changan, Helian Bobo, now master of nearly half of northern China, declared himself emperor.

The revived Xiongnu Empire in China would however prove to be as short-lived as the Han-Zhao Xiongnu Empire of the preceding fourth century AD. In 431 AD Helian Bobo's Xiongnu Xia Empire was extinguished by the Tuoba Xianbei. Eight years later in 439 AD the last Xiongnu Hun state in East Asia, the Northern Liang kingdom of the Xiongnu Juqu clan, fell to the Tuoba Xianbei as well. The Xianbei now ruled all of northern China and founded the long-lived Northern Wei Empire. The Juqu clan of the Northern Liang fled west to Gaochang in eastern Xinjiang where they continued Xiongnu rule until 460 AD. This rump Xiongnu statelet was finally annexed by the powerful Rouran Khaganate of Mongolia which was itself created by the fusion of Xiongnu Hun remnants with the Xianbei and perhaps also the Wuhuan.

The Southern Xiongnu did not simply disappear as a people after the dissolution of the Xiongnu Empire in the late first century AD, or even after the destruction of the Han-Zhao Xiongnu state in the mid fourth century AD. The Xiongnu as political entities lasted until the middle of the fifth century AD in East Asia, displaying a longevity and tenacity rarely seen in the annals of history. Even after living for nearly 300 years in close proximity with the Chinese, the Xiongnu of the east maintained their distinctive Hunnic identity. As we shall see later in the book, the Huns of Europe likewise did not simply vanish after the death of Attila the Hun.

The Xiongnu Huns in traditional Chinese historiography almost uniformly are treated as cruel and arrogant barbarians, whose rule over China was illegitimate and purely destructive. Their representation in Chinese sources is strikingly similar to the equally hostile representation found in our Greco-Roman sources and even some modern historiography on the Huns. Were they simply an aberration, a disastrous calamity that slowed down the progress of civilization in both the east and west? Such a simplistic representation has obvious deficiencies.

When the Tuoba Xianbei who had also originated out of the old Xiongnu Empire unified China and established the Northern Wei Empire (386–534 AD), these Inner Asian conquerors of the Chinese introduced into China some of the characteristic features of the old Xiongnu political system. The quasi-feudal tradition of the steppes was applied to a Chinese context and helped create a system in which a 'barbarian', military aristocracy ruled over the majority Chinese with

the assistance of native bureaucrats. We will see a mirror image of this phenomenon later on in Ostrogothic Italy and Frankish Gaul, which were controlled by political groups also originating out of another Hunnic Empire, that of Attila and the European Huns. Over a period of some 150 years the Inner Asian Northern Wei emperors in the typical steppe manner distributed nearly 850 appanages to the military aristocracy and royal princes. Well over three-quarters of these fiefs were granted to ethnically Tuoba nobles, thus ensuring the preservation of elite Xianbei aristocratic ascendancy.³⁷ A very similar quasi-feudal system will be observed later on in the book in Europe and also in Central and South Asia where the western cousins of these eastern Inner Asians established their own Inner Asian Empires under the name Hun.

The Northern Wei would later split into eastern and western halves and the largely Inner Asian ruling elite of the western half produced the Northern Zhou and Sui dynasties that eventually reunified China. The Li imperial clan of the succeeding Tang dynasty (618–907 AD) was also heavily influenced by Inner Asian precedents and as a matter of fact was related by marriage to the old Inner Asian ruling elite. Inner Asian Turkish cavalry was utilized to unify China after the collapse of the previous, short-lived Sui dynasty (581–618 AD)³⁸ and many of the powerful aristocrats at the Tang court (including in some cases the emperors themselves) could speak Turkish or were Turks commanding Turkish troops in imperial service. The impact of the Inner Asian Huns and their successors on imperial China was therefore quite profound. An in-depth scholarly research and analysis of this early Inner Asian influence on China remains to be seen.

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE XIONGNU

A full exposition of the archaeology of the Xiongnu is not within the parameters of this book, but it can be noted that the recent progress in Xiongnu archaeology has veritably revolutionized our understanding of Xiongnu society. Four fully excavated Xiongnu cemeteries (Ivolga, Dyrestui, Burkhan Tolgoi and Daodunzi) and thousands of other recorded tombs in Transbaikalia and Mongolia are gradually reshaping our perception of Xiongnu culture, political organization and economy. For the best collection of the most recent research on Xiongnu archaeology one should consult Brosseder and Miller's *Xiongnu Archaeology: Multidisciplinary Perspectives of the First Steppe Empire in Inner Asia*, 2011a.³⁹

What the archaeological record shows is that the Xiongnu were not the aimlessly 'wandering nomads' of lore, but in reality an empire that 'encompassed vast territories and varied regions'.⁴⁰ The dominant

element within this empire was steppe pastoralists affiliated with the ruling dynasty and the high aristocracy. However, pastoralism was only one aspect of the Xiongnu economy, which was much more diverse. Agriculture played a significant role and there is archaeological evidence of walled enclosures that have yielded agricultural tools within Xiongnu territory which had previously been thought to be primarily, if not exclusively, pastoralist. In fact, up to 20 fortified settlements have so far been documented in Xiongnu territory. These settlements were permanent sites with buildings of various types, some of which boast an impressive size.⁴¹ The Xiongnu were also extremely active in trade, and grave goods found in Xiongnu cemeteries have yielded both Chinese metal and lacquer vessels and textiles from the southeast and also items originating from the far west from the Greco-Bactrian areas in Central Asia.⁴²

TABLE 1.3 Major Inner Asian and non-Chinese dynasties in China, fourth–seventh centuries AD

Xiongnu (Hunnic)	Xianbei (Mongolic)	Di (Tibeto-Burman?)	Qiang (Tibeto-Burman?)	Tujué (Turkic)
Han-Zhao (304–29 AD under the Southern Xiongnu Liu clan; 330–51 AD under the Jie Shi clan, as the Later Zhao, overthrown by Chinese insurrection) Xia (407–31 AD under the Helian clan, conquered by Northern Wei) Northern Liang (397–460 AD under the Juqu clan, conquered by Northern Wei in 439 AD, remnants in Gaochang conquered by Rouran in 460 AD)	Former Yan (337–70 AD under the Murong clan, conquered by Former Qin) Later Yan (384–409 AD under the Murong clan, conquered by Northern Wei) Northern Wei (386–535 AD under the Tuoba clan, unified northern China, eventually succeeded by Northern Zhou of the Xianbei Yuwen clan) Sui dynasty (581–618 AD under the Yang clan, related to the Xianbei nobility by marriage, unified all of China)	Former Qin (351–94 AD under the clan of king Fu Jian, briefly united northern China, but soon disintegrated)	Later Qin (384–417 AD, its territory was eventually taken over by Helian Bobo's Xiongnu Xia Empire)	Tang dynasty (618–907 AD under the Li clan, ruled a unified Chinese Empire, with deep connections to both the Turks and Xianbei)

New research is at the same time breaking the old preconception

that the Xiongnu comprised a homogeneous racial or ethnic category. What we are encountering is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, polyglot and multi-tiered society with a diversified agro-pastoral economy⁴³ and highly stratified political order. The name Xiongnu was clearly a socio-political designation denoting a unified imperial political entity and it cannot be interpreted as the designation of a culturally or genetically homogeneous group. It is a collective label of an imperial entity that encompassed a great variety of ethnic groups and archaeological cultures.

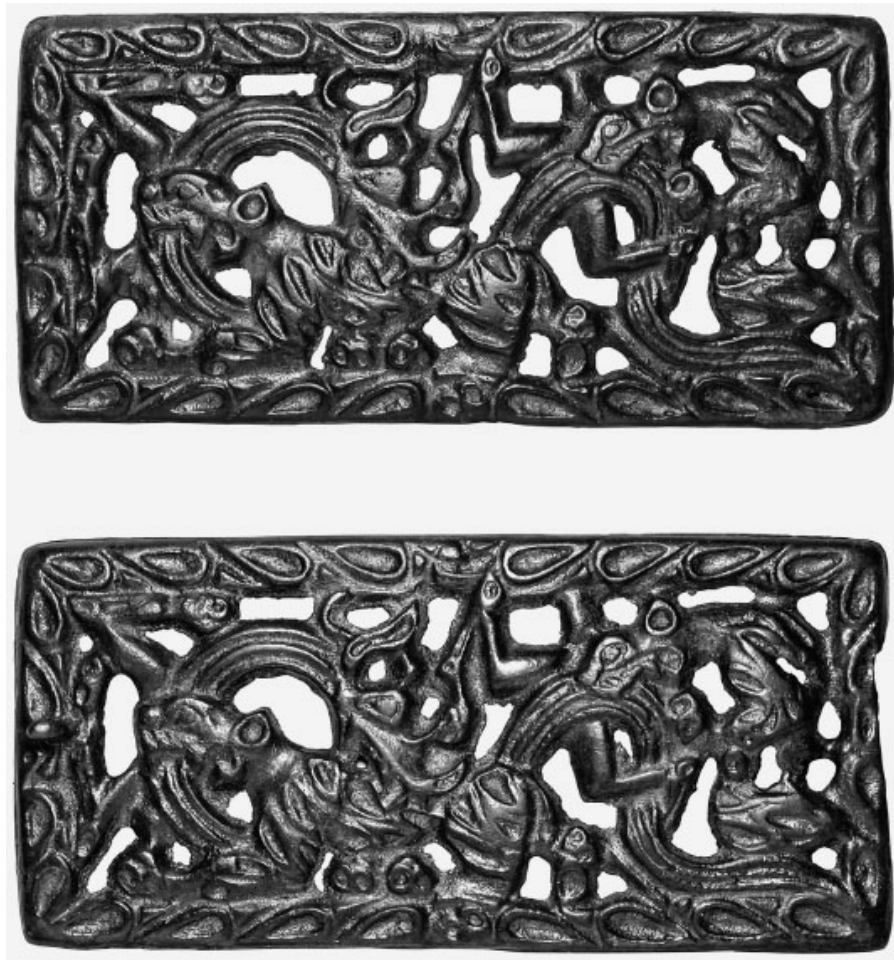


FIGURE 1.1 Xiongnu plaques from the Ivolga excavation site

Courtesy of Professor Ursula Brosseder

NOTES

- 1 Honeychurch and Amartuvshin (2006), 255–78, in particular 262.
- 2 Kradin (2002).
- 3 Tapper (1991), 525.
- 4 Barfield (1981), 59.
- 5 Kradin (2002), 368–88. See also his 2011 article, in particular p. 82, where he reiterates his stated position and calls the Xiongnu a centralized imperial confederation, a stateless empire. See also p. 94.
- 6 Krader (1978), 108.
- 7 de Crespigny (1984), 178.
- 8 The supreme ruler and the equivalent of the Turco-Mongol Khagan. For discussion see Kürsat-Ahlers (1994), 268–70.
- 9 Translation from Watson (1961), vol. 2, 163–4.
- 10 Pulleyblank (2000a), 64.
- 11 Christian (1998), 194.
- 12 More on these people shortly.
- 13 Brosseder and Miller (2011a), 20.
- 14 Barfield (1981), 48–9.
- 15 Kürsat-Ahlers (1994), 289–90, argues for a Xiongnu bureaucracy in the form of a military organization.
- 16 Christian (1998), 194.
- 17 Yü (1990), 124.
- 18 Di Cosmo (2011), 44–5.
- 19 Kradin (2011), 94–5, number of functionaries were limited he argues.
- 20 For discussion on what constitutes an ‘early state’ see Claessen and Skalnik (1978), 22–3 and also Scheidel (2011), 114. The majority of Xiongnu experts are in agreement that a form of early statehood for the Xiongnu polity is beyond any doubt.
- 21 Di Cosmo (2011), 44–5.
- 22 Di Cosmo (2011), 47–8.
- 23 Kollautz and Miyakawa (1970), 45. For Xiongnu elite governance and feudalism see Yü (1990), 135–6.
- 24 Pulleyblank (2000a), 70.
- 25 See Pulleyblank (2000a), 53 for the possible Scythian impact on early Xiongnu culture.
- 26 Khazanov (1984), 178; Kollautz and Miyakawa (1970), 44.
- 27 Christian (1998), 129–31.
- 28 See Melyukova (1990), 110–17, for a short discussion on the Sarmatians. For a more detailed treatment see Batty (2007), 225–36.
- 29 *Geography* 7. 3. 17. See also Ptolemy 5.9.16, Harmatta (1970), 12, 14–15.
- 30 For the early history of the Alans and their political organization the following primary sources are useful: Lucian, *Toxaris* 51; Moses Khorenatsi, *History of the Armenians* 2.50, 58; P’austos Buzand, *History of the Armenians* 3, 6–7.
- 31 Yatsenko (2003), 93.
- 32 For excellent summaries of Xiongnu history see Barfield (1989), 32–84, and Yü (1990), 118–50.
- 33 The *Han Shu* is considered to be the authoritative history of the first half of the Han dynasty. It was compiled mainly by Ban Gu in the first century AD and is in effect the continuation of the *Shiji* of Sima Qian with some overlap.
- 34 Barfield (1989), 87.
- 35 Golzio (1984), 22–3.
- 36 See Holmgren (1982), 65–9. The Di were one of the so-called five *Hu* (barbarians) to rule China in Late Antiquity. They were a people related

linguistically and perhaps ethnically to modern Tibetans or Burmans.

37 Kwanten (1979), 16.

38 Lattimore (1979), 485; Pulleyblank (2000b), 82–3.

39 For a full reference consult bibliography.

40 Brosseder and Miller (2011b), 22.

41 For details on these settlements and their fortifications, buildings etc. see Danilov (2011), 129–36.

42 Brosseder and Miller (2011b), 25.

43 Batsaikhan (2011), 122.

2 THE SO-CALLED ‘TWO-HUNDRED YEARS INTERLUDE’

In the previous chapter we have seen how the once mighty Xiongnu Hun Empire in Inner Asia split into two halves, the Northern Xiongnu and the Southern Xiongnu. We have also observed how the Southern Xiongnu gravitated south to the Ordos region and eventually became the first non-Chinese ‘barbarian’ people to rule northern China. The political strife between various factions of the Southern Xiongnu was also discussed and how in the end the whole of northern China was unified by the Tuoba Xianbei. The Northern Xiongnu for their part were driven out of Mongolia by their erstwhile subjects the Xianbei. Some 100,000 Xiongnu house-holds were incorporated into the new Xianbei confederation, which incidentally simply meant the transfer of political authority from one group of elite to another within pretty much the same political community, rather than the extinction of the Xiongnu as a ‘people’. After all the Xianbei were a constituent part of the Xiongnu state/proto-state. The Xiongnu as explained earlier denoted primarily a political body and its governing elite rather than an ethnic or racial category, although it is clear that the ruling elite of the Xianbei were primarily Mongolic language speakers while the Xiongnu elite seem to have been more akin to Turkic and Yeniseian languages. By the mid second century AD pockets of Xiongnu elite rule existed in the eastern steppes under Xianbei overlordship and tiny Xiongnu statelets were to be found in the Tarim basin. However, the main bulk of the Northern Xiongnu nation was thought to be ‘lost’ somewhere in the west by many historians.

Between the mid second century AD and the appearance of the Huns in Greco-Roman historical sources in the mid fourth century AD it was often thought that there is a gap of about two-hundred years during which we know next to nothing about the Huns. It was assumed by many that the Chinese had little to say about the Northern Xiongnu during this time and it is therefore impossible to establish a firm connection between these Xiongnu and the later Huns. Fortunately, more recent research on Chinese sources has allowed us to establish a clearer picture of this ‘two-hundred years’ interlude’. Were the Northern Xiongnu extinguished as a political entity? Did they simply

vanish during these two-hundred years? Were they completely absorbed by other polities like the Xianbei? The answer is none of the above.

The *Weilue* (= *Sanguozhi* 30.863–864), a mid third century AD source, which we have already met before, gives us a clear indication that the Xiongnu still existed at the time as a political entity in the Altai region, just west of their original power centre in Mongolia, a hundred years after the mid second century AD which supposedly initiated the two-hundred years' 'gap' in our sources. The *Wei Shu* (103.2290), the history of the Tuoba Xianbei state of Northern Wei in China, adds that towards the beginning of the fifth century to the northwest of the Rouran (then the ruling power in Mongolia) there were still in the vicinity of the Altai the remaining descendants of the Xiongnu. The *Weilue* also provides us with a clear sense of the geographical context in which these Xiongnu Huns were situated in the third century AD. The *Weilue* notes that the Zhetysu region (modern eastern Kazakhstan) directly to the southwest of the Altai (where the Xiongnu were located) was still occupied by the Wusun people, and the area to the west of this area and north of the Kangju people (centred around the city of Tashkent in what is now modern Uzbekistan) was the territory of the Turkic Dingling tribes. The Wusun and the Kangju are said to have neither expanded nor shrunk since Han times.

By the fifth century however, our Chinese sources indicate that this geographical situation had been radically altered. The *Wei Shu* (102.2268) indicates that a people called the Yueban Xiongnu were now occupying the territory of the Wusun and further makes the observation that these Yueban were a horde of the Chanyu of the Northern Xiongnu. It tells us that when the Northern Xiongnu were defeated by the Han imperial armies they fled westwards. The weak elements among them were left behind in the area north of the city of Qiuci (now in central Xinjiang). Afterwards this weak group of Xiongnu is said to have subjected the land of the Wusun to form the new state of Yueban. The stronger group of Xiongnu/Huns are reported to have headed further west. The *Wei Shu* (102, 9b, 5–6 = *Bei Shi* 97, 14b, 7–8) shows that the remnants of the defeated Wusun were to be found in the fifth century AD in the Pamirs. Archaeology in addition to the written evidence shows that the main group of Huns/Xiongnu in the Altai region (i.e. the strong Xiongnu as opposed to the weak Xiongnu Yueban) had already started to absorb the Dingling Turkic tribes to their west, an area corresponding to modern northern/northeastern Kazakhstan, and the Irtysh and Middle Ob regions (western Siberia) in the third century AD.¹ This corresponds exactly with the areas from which the Huns of Europe and the Huns of

Central Asia would later start their trek to Europe and Sogdia respectively. The *Wei Shu* (102.2278–9) confirms that the Central Asian White Huns originated from the Altai region and moved into Central Asia ca. 360 AD,² at exactly the same time the European Huns were moving into Europe at the expense of the Alans and later the Goths.

The defeat suffered by the Xiongnu Huns at the hands of the Xianbei under their inspired leader Tian Shi-huai had not finished off the Northern Xiongnu. Far from it, our sources clearly show that the Xiongnu Huns survived in the Altai region and then later expanded into Central Asia. The *Wei Shu* specifically states that the fifth century rulers of Sogdia, that is the White Huns, were of Xiongnu origin (102.2270). It also calls the country wen-na-sha, pronounced Huna sha in Early Middle Chinese, i.e. king of the Huns.³

A fifth century Chinese geographical source called the *Shi-san zhou ji* by Gan Yin (preserved in the historical source *Sung Shu* 98), on the basis of information derived in all probability from Sogdian merchants, notes that the Alans of Europe and the Sogdians (whom the Chinese of the Tuoba Wei court recently learned had been conquered by the Xiongnu Huns three generations earlier) were under the control of different rulers. As Pulleyblank points out, the need to clarify this implies the common misapprehension among contemporaries that both peoples were ruled by the same ruler, which is quite understandable when we consider the fact that both peoples had been conquered within the space of some ten years by similar political groups both called Huns.⁴ Therefore, the literary evidence now strongly supports the political (maybe even ethnic) identification of the European and Central Asian Huns with the Xiongnu of Mongolia.

However, while the Huns were languishing in relative obscurity in the Altai region other peoples of Inner Asia were flourishing in the territories that the Huns would later absorb in their trek towards Europe, Persia and India in the fourth century AD. The political and cultural sophistication of these Inner Asian peoples whom the Huns absorbed into their empires further serves to emphasize the complexity and sophistication of the Xiongnu/Hun political model, which facilitated the absorption of such sophisticated political entities. It furthermore contradicts the erroneous picture of a 'primitive' Hunnic horde emerging from the 'backward' steppes. Inner Asia between the second and fourth centuries AD was far from primitive or backward. In fact the area was arguably the centre of Eurasian civilizational exchange and trade.

During the second and third centuries AD Central Asia was dominated by another formidable empire, that of the Kushans whose

territory extended from the Tarim basin (to the south of the Altai region where the Xiongnu Huns were situated at this time) to northern India. This formidable empire was founded by the Five Da Yuezhi of Bactria (modern northern Afghanistan), who as we have seen in the previous chapter were originally a steppe people of Tocharian or Iranian extraction driven out of Xinjiang and Gansu by the Xiongnu Empire ca. 162 BC. The Chinese source *Han Shu* (61 4B) provides us with a brief account of their migration west. After their defeat at the hands of the Xiongnu the Yuezhi apparently forced their way into the territory of the Sai (Saka)⁵ in modern eastern Kazakhstan. The displaced Saka then poured into the Greco-Bactrian kingdom founded by Alexander the Great's successors (Strabo 11.8.4) in modern Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. The Saka were then driven further into Parthia, Sistan (= Sakastan in eastern Iran that is named after them) and even into Pakistan and India by the advancing Yuezhi. The last Yuezhi push against the Saka was the consequence of further Xiongnu Hun activity to the east. The Wusun, as vassals of the Xiongnu, managed to inflict yet another crippling defeat on the Yuezhi and the despondent Yuezhi were forced to move again this time into Bactria at the expense of the Saka.

The Yuezhi, when they settled in Bactria, were at first governed by five rulers. However, among these five 'Yabghus'⁶ (kings) the Lord of the Guishuang/Kushan tribe would eventually emerge as the supreme ruler. Under this Kushan dynasty the Yuezhi state came to dominate most of southern Central Asia and parts of South Asia. This is not the place to relate the detailed history of the Kushans, but it is necessary to point out here very briefly the similarities between the Kushan and Xiongnu-Hunnic political practices. Many historians have dismissed the possibility of political sophistication of the Huns due to the belief (erroneous) that, even if the Huns were the Xiongnu, the two-hundred years between the mid second century AD and the fourth century AD would somehow have made it difficult for the Huns to replicate former Xiongnu imperial political models.

Such assumptions are odd to begin with, however, and when we observe the political systems of steppe peoples between the second and fourth centuries AD in Central Asia from which the Huns later emerged, those positions become simply untenable. The above mentioned Kushans possessed political institutions that closely resemble the old Xiongnu and later Hunnic models. Like the Xiongnu the Yuezhi possessed a political and ceremonial centre even when they were ruled by the five yabghus and not yet united under a single dynasty. We can also see the overlapping of military and civilian administration so typical of the Xiongnu system of government in the Kushan system. Kushan inscriptions show that officials called

dandanayaka and *mahadandanayaka* performed both civil and military functions throughout India.

Even more strikingly we learn that among the Kushans collateral succession to the imperial throne and some form of joint rulership and association of sub-kings in the imperial administration were persistently practised right up to the end of their empire in the third century AD.⁷ A very similar system of government is also found among the contemporary Sakas (also from Inner Asia) and the Pahlavas (Indo-Parthians) in India. Among the Saka rulers of Mathura in western India a senior king was assisted in his duties by a junior king in a highly developed system of joint rule and this is made clear in the concept of *dvairajya* (double kingship) among them. Thus, as among the Xiongnu and later steppe empires the Yuezhi/Kushans and even the Saka in India seem to have practised dualism/collective rule and possessed an elaborate hierarchy of sub-kings and officials. Interestingly the Kushans like the Hephthalite and European Huns and also the Alans practised the widespread western steppe custom of artificial cranial deformation which would later be introduced into Europe by the Huns and Alans.⁸



FIGURE 2.1 Kushans-Huvishka-Shahrevar coins

Courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum

The great Kushans were later defeated by the Sassanian Persians in the mid third century AD and Shapur I of Persia (r. 240–70 AD) turned the Kushan territories into a subsidiary of the wider Persian Empire. The Kushan remnants would survive as the so-called Kushanshahs under Sassanian overlordship until the Hunnic conquest in the fourth century AD. The Yuezhi Kushans, whom the White Huns under the Kidarite dynasty later absorbed (more on this later), were however far from unique. Other steppe polities situated even closer to the Xiongnu

Hun power centre in the Altai also possessed matching political sophistication in those ‘two-hundred years’.



FIGURE 2.2 Kushans-Kujula-Kadphises coins

Courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum

The Kangju state of northern Uzbekistan and southern Kazakhstan was an equally well-organised state entity that became a power to be reckoned with in the first century AD. Their power was such that they managed to subjugate the warlike Yancai (later the Alans) in western Kazakhstan and keep them in that state of subservience until at least the second century AD.⁹ These Kangju were ruled by a *yabgu* like the Yuezhi Kushans with whom they were dynastically linked by marriage. They also possessed a system of five ‘lesser kings’, indicating that they too had very similar political institutions to their southern and eastern neighbours. Just like the Xiongnu/Huns to the east the Kangju would impose their own ruling elite upon the conquered Alans. Signs of Kangju-Xiongnu contacts can also be seen archaeologically in the discovery of a Xiongnu (Hunnic) style silver belt plaque at Kultobe in Kazakhstan, a site identified as belonging to the Kangju.¹⁰ Many of the sophisticated inhabitants of the Kangju were also actually urban dwellers and only partially pastoralist.

The Wusun, the direct neighbours of the Huns to the southwest in the Ili basin, whose territory the Xiongnu/Huns would later absorb in their expansion west and south in the fourth century AD, also show signs of highly developed political institutions that are reminiscent of the Xiongnu Hun models. Among the Wusun there was a hereditary monarch who was assisted in his duties by a council of elders, a body of aristocrats that could function as a restraint on the powers of the sovereign. There was likewise a fairly complex administrative apparatus consisting of 16 graded officials, who were recruited from the ruling nobility. The officials and nobles of the realm collected

taxes/tribute from subordinate tribes and supplemented their income via war booty and profits from trading activities (much the same as the Hunnic elite later in Europe). The Kunmo, the Wusun Great king and his two sons, the rulers of the left and right domains (in exactly the same way as the Xiongnu), with each wing-ruler commanding a personal force of 10,000 horsemen, ruled over a sophisticated political entity. Both the Kangju and the Wusun were absorbed by the Huns before the Huns advanced on the Alans and Goths in Europe and the Persians and Kushanshahs in eastern Iran and Afghanistan.

It is therefore no longer possible to argue that during the 'two-hundred years interlude' the Huns lacked political organization, since they were stuck in a politically 'backward' region. The observation of the political organization of surrounding peoples who were later conquered by the Huns before their entry into Europe reveals that political organization on a par with the earlier described Xiongnu model in Mongolia and Turkestan existed all throughout the two-hundred years in Inner Asia. These states of Inner Asia did not lack political organization and neither did the Huns who emerged from this region.

In the first and second centuries AD the Xiongnu Huns were in desperate straits. They were for all intents and purposes surrounded by hostile powers around their core base in the Altai region. To the west and south the Dingling, Kangju and Wusun exerted pressure. To the east the powerful Xianbei and the Han Empire were driving them out completely from their eastern territories. However, respite came to them after the third century AD when each of these menaces disappeared in quick succession. To the east the Han Empire descended into civil war, split into three kingdoms and could no longer exert any influence west. The Xianbei who had earlier inflicted monumental defeats on the Huns during the second century AD were fragmented into feuding tribes. To the west and southwest the Kangju and Kushan Empires were slowly dissolving. It is this favourable geopolitical situation that allowed the Xiongnu to expand into Central Asia and Europe. Archaeological evidence from the Ural region seems to point to the expansion of the Huns into that area by the early fourth century AD at the latest.¹¹ This suggests that all the states and tribes between the Altai and the Urals had succumbed to Hunnic conquest by the early fourth century. In the next chapter we will discuss the conquest of Central Asia, Persia and India by the Huns.

NOTES

¹ Érdy (1995), 45

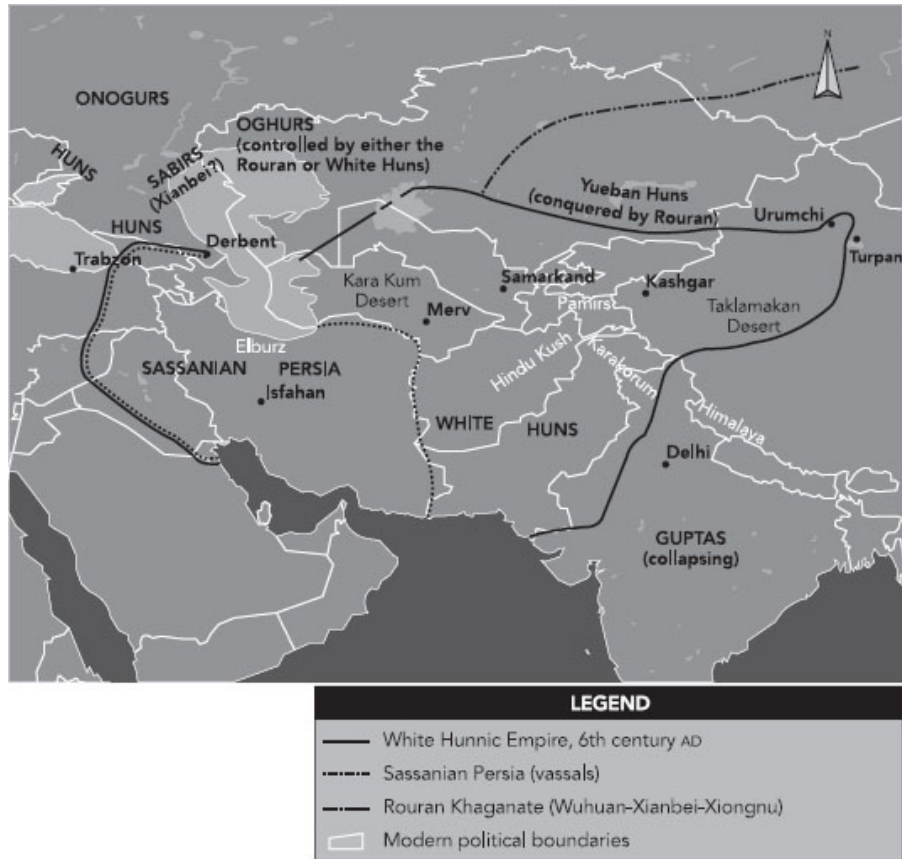
² La Vaissière (2005), 21.

- 3 See Pulleyblank (2000b), 91–2.
- 4 Pulleyblank (2000b), 94.
- 5 For discussion on this identification see Benjamin (2007), 97–100, and Hill (2009), 537.
- 6 On the five Yabghus see Grenet (2006).
- 7 Narain (1990), 167.
- 8 Czeglédy (1983), 91; Sinor (1990a), 202–3; Kollautz and Miyakawa (1970), 210–12; Narain (1990), 172–3.
- 9 Zadneprovskiy (1994), 463, 466–7; Alemany (2000), 398; Kyzlasov (1996), 316.
- 10 See Grenet et al. (2007), 1019.
- 11 Érdy (1995), 22.

3 THE HUNS OF CENTRAL ASIA AND SOUTH ASIA: THE KIDARITE AND HEPHTHALITE WHITE HUNS

While their cousins who had entered Europe were earning for themselves immortal fame or infamy for their exploits against the Romans and various Germanic peoples, an equally formidable group of Huns left their mark on the history of Central Asia, Iran and India. Their story is not as well known as the story of the European Huns. However, any history of the Huns that leaves out these Central Asian cousins of the European Huns would be incomplete. Only when we view them together can we begin to grasp the full significance of Hunnic expansion across Eurasia. This does not imply of course that the Huns of Central Asia and those of Europe were part of the same political body or had some sort of loose political allegiance to each other. In all likelihood, if such ties existed at the beginning, they rapidly disappeared after the power centres of the Central Asian and European Huns went their separate ways and vast distances began to separate them.

The reconstruction of the history of the Huns in Europe has suffered from the fragmentary nature of the sources relating their history (mainly Greco-Roman). The story of the Central Asian Huns is even more difficult to reconstruct because they were for extended periods largely beyond the geopolitical area of interest of both the Greco-Roman historians and Chinese historical sources, while Persian and Indian records provide only limited information. Records about them when they do appear are often contradictory and difficult to interpret. Recent research has allowed us to at least resolve some of the vexing issues surrounding their history, although a full reconstruction of that history still eludes experts.



MAP 3.1 White Hunnic Empire

WHO WERE THE WHITE HUNS?

Much of the research on the Central Asian Huns has been focused on identifying who exactly they were. Debates have raged over their ethnic and racial provenance in particular, much of it fuelled by the contradictory information we find in our Chinese sources about the origin of the rulers of the White Hun Empire. The designation White Hun (Sveta (white) Huna in Indian sources) is found in both our Roman and Indian sources and was most likely the self-designation of the overarching political entity chosen by the Huns of Central Asia and there can be no dispute that in this political entity the Huns existed as a political grouping. However, questions have been asked as to whether these White Huns were the same as the Huns who entered Europe and whether the White Huns were governed by Huns or by some other ethnic group. Who were their ancestors and what kind of culture did they possess? These were all perplexing questions and we

are now finally able to provide some cautious and limited answers to these vexing questions.

As to whether the Central Asian Huns were the same ethnic group as the Huns who entered Europe, the question itself is a self-defeating one, since the Huns were not primarily an ethnic group, but a political category. What seems certain is that the Central Asian Huns derived from the Xiongnu Empire. Our Chinese sources are unequivocal that the White Hunnic conquerors of Central Asia were originally Xiongnu. As explained earlier, the *Wei Shu* specifically states that the fifth century rulers of Sogdia,¹ i.e. the White Huns, are Xiongnu in origin (102.2270), thereby confirming the link between Central Asian Huns and the Xiongnu of the Mongolia-Altai region, and calls the country wen-na-sha, pronounced Huna sha in Early Middle Chinese, i.e. king of the Huns.² Archaeological evidence may also be mentioned in support of the Xiongnu-Central Asian Hun connection. A Hunnic-Xiongnu type cauldron was found near the Amu Darya valley in the Khiva area (northwestern Uzbekistan) and two Hunnic funerary cauldrons made of clay were discovered in the delta of the Syr Darya river, which point to the Xiongnu political and cultural identity of the White Huns. Related artefacts have also been found in the areas controlled by the European Huns as well, which all point to the same tentative conclusion that both the European and Central Asian Huns were Xiongnu in origin.³

As also noted earlier, the *Wei Shu* (103.2290) tells us that towards the beginning of the fifth century to the northwest of the Rouran Khaganate (Mongolia) there was still in the vicinity of the Altai the remaining descendants of the old Xiongnu.⁴ *Wei Shu* (102.2278–9) gives more details and relates how the Yeda (i.e. Hephthalites, who are confusingly described as being either of the race of the Yuezhi (Indo-European) or a branch of the Gaoche (Dingling Turks)) ruling clan of the White Huns originated from the Altai mountains (where the *Weilue* places the Xiongnu in the third century AD), whence they migrated to the southwest into Central Asia ca. 360 AD.⁵ Therefore, although it is not possible to confirm or deny the common ethnicity of the Central Asian Huns and the European Huns, we can now be reasonably certain that the Central Asian Huns were like the European Huns, a political group that originated out of the old Xiongnu Empire and that they used the same name ‘Hun’ as their state appellation.

What is less certain is the identity of the ruling family of this Hunnic Empire in Central Asia. While the Huns were building their empires in Europe and Central Asia in the eastern steppes new confederations began to accumulate power. One of them was called the Rouran, a formidable power group which eventually came to dominate all of Mongolia and who were possibly the so-called Avars

of later steppe history. Another less powerful group called the Hua, who according to Chinese sources were originally the vassals of the Rouran, also emerged out of obscurity. This latter group commands our attention because the Chinese source *Liangshu* (54.812) may provide evidence that would link this steppe confederation (Hua) to the 'Hephthalite' clan which in the fifth century AD ruled the White Hun Empire.

It has been speculated that the Hephthalites were the ruling dynasty of the Hua, who were originally under Rouran overlordship, but later broke free from the Rouran to assume the leadership of the White Hunnic state in the fifth century AD.⁶ Scholars have furthermore asserted that the Chinese glyph for Hua was actually read Var in Early Middle Chinese. Pulleyblank has argued that these Var are in fact identical with the famous Wuhuan of earlier centuries, who were a branch of the Mongolic Donghu confederation (the other branch of which was the now familiar Xianbei). The argument is that Wuhuan in Early Middle Chinese was pronounced something like 'Agwan', which due to the absence of the sound *r* in Early Middle Chinese was the contemporary rendering of Agwar or Avar.⁷ This could conceivably make the Hephthalites and the Hua the later Avars who erupted into Europe in the sixth century AD.

However La Vaissière, another notable expert, suggests an alternative reading, which would make Hua the Early Middle Chinese for Ghor, a region of Afghanistan inhabited by the Hephthalites, rather than Var. As of today there is no consensus on the transliteration of Hua. Were the Hephthalites of the fifth century AD new arrivals who hijacked the White Hunnic Empire from its previous Hunnic dynastic rulers or were they simply part of the original Hunnic (Oghuric Turkic) invasion of Central Asia that rose to prominence later within the White Hunnic confederation (La Vaissière's argument)? So far there is no clear answer to this perplexing question. Theophylact Simocatta,⁸ a late East Roman source from the seventh century AD, provides us with some interesting hints by indicating that the two leading tribes of the Ogur confederation (most probably to be located in modern Kazakhstan) were the Var (possibly Hua-Hephthalites) and Khunni (presumably Huns). Menander (a sixth century AD East Roman source) also refers to the Varkunites,⁹ as does Pseudo-Moses of Chorene (an Armenian source) who calls them Walxon (again Var and Hun). This allows us to infer that a mixing of Vars and Huns had taken place some time in the fifth century AD in territory adjacent to the White Hun realm in the north. However, the Var mentioned here may simply be a reference to members of the contemporary Tiele (Chile) Turkic tribal confederacy in the region and may not be linked to the Hua (possibly Var) tribe associated with the Hephthalites.¹⁰

WHITE HUNNIC EXPANSION AND THE KIDARITE DYNASTY

The scholar Czeglédy in the mid twentieth century had speculated that the Hua, whom he assumed to be Vars (Avars), may have expanded into Western Turkestan (Central Asia) in the middle of the fourth century AD and that this may have been the trigger that ignited the great Hunnic migration west in the same century.¹¹ He associated this Hua (Var) activity in Western Turkestan with the rise of the more powerful Rouran (probably in origin the Wuhuan (Avars?) already mentioned above) further to the east. These Rouran, who were originally located in the vicinity of the city of Dunhuang, in close proximity to Turpan (eastern Xinjiang), began their extraordinary rise under Shelun Khagan in the late fourth century. However, there is as yet no firm evidence that would indicate that the Rouran expanded further west before Shelun's rise in the late fourth century AD, i.e. they appear too late on the scene to have been responsible for putting pressure on the Hua and Huns in the mid fourth century AD. The Hua or the Hephthalites, if our Chinese sources are correct, became the vassals of the Rouran presumably some time in the late fourth century AD or early fifth century AD.

The first Rouran movement into what is now modern Kazakhstan (the original territory of the European Huns in the fourth century AD) should probably be dated to the time of the Tuoba Wei alliance with the Yueban Huns in the fifth century against the Rouran, which is obviously too late to have affected the original Hunnic expansion into Europe and Central Asia. More recently it has been proposed that the Huns started moving west out of the Altai in the fourth century AD, not because of renewed military pressure from the east (for instance from the Rouran), but because of radical climate deterioration in the Altai region in that century.¹² Neither the military pressure theory nor the climate change explanation are satisfactory, since the Hunnic expansion west of the Altai region may well have commenced long before the fourth century. Érdy, on the basis of archaeological evidence provided by Hunnic cauldrons, has argued for a Hunnic presence in the Tobol, Irtysh, Middle Ob region already in the third century AD.¹³ However, the drastic change in climate in the fourth century may have had an impact on the sudden thrust of the Huns remaining in the Altai region in a southwesterly direction into Central Asia. As La Vaissière shows in his excellent analysis of the Chinese sources on the early migration of the White Huns, the Huns from the Altai suddenly moved south in the 350s AD.¹⁴ The invasion of these Huns rapidly swallowed up what was left of the Kangju state, and put immense pressure on the eastern borders of the Sassanians and Kushan

remnants in southern Central Asia.

The so-called Kidarite (possibly a term referring to western Huns, deriving from the old Turkic runic term *kidirti* meaning west)¹⁵ Huns figure prominently in this initial Hunnic intrusion into southern Central Asia and we find them in firm possession of Bactria ca. 360 AD.¹⁶ An Armenian source, P'awstos Buzandac'i, tells us that the Hon (Huns) under the Kidarite dynasty conquered the region some time before 367 AD. The question of whether this Kidarite dynasty was ethnically 'Mongoloid' Huns (a preconception based on the premise that the Huns were Turkic, and Turks = Mongoloid) or 'Caucasian' Iranians has provoked a fruitless discussion among scholars and became, somewhat discouragingly, the dominant focus of research. Tremblay (2001) believed that they and the later Hephthalites, who overthrew them, were both Iranian in origin. Grenet (2002) thought likewise.

The whole debate was to a certain degree influenced by the confused account left by the Roman historian Procopius (sixth century AD) about the name of the Hunnic state in Central Asia: White Huns. Both Procopius and our Indian sources call the Central Asian Huns White Huns or Sveta Huna (White Huns). Procopius (1.3.2-7) noted that the White Huns were ruled by a king and were guided by a lawful constitution, i.e. that they had a sophisticated state structure comparable to those of the Sassanian Persians, with whom they were often in conflict, and also to those of the Romans. But he then misinterpreted the appellation 'white' to mean that the White Huns were white and not swarthy like the European Huns supposedly were. As Pulleyblank points out, the colour white was simply symbolic of west among steppe nomads. Black signified north and red the south, hence the existence also of Red Huns (Kermichiones or Alkhon from the Turkic Al-for scarlet+ Hun, meaning Red Huns), who were the southern wing of the White Huns.¹⁷ As Pritsak points out, in steppe societies the colour black signifying north and the colour blue signifying east, both of which carried connotations of greatness and supremacy,¹⁸ almost always had precedence over white (west) and red (south). Thus whichever group constituted the Black or Blue Huns (if they existed, or are identifiable with known Hunnic groups such as Attila's Huns in Europe or the Yueban Huns in Kazakhstan) probably possessed seniority over the White Huns, at least initially. The fact that the colour black, *kara* in Turkish, suggested elevated status among the European Huns also as it did among other Inner Asian Turkic peoples, seems to be confirmed by the report in Olympiodorus (a fifth century AD Roman historian) that the supreme king of the Huns was called Karaton.¹⁹

The Kidarite usage of earlier Kushan symbolism in their coins led

some scholars to attribute to them a native Iranian identity. However, it is now becoming increasingly evident that the Kidarites (whose name, as mentioned above, may simply indicate that they are the western Huns) were Hunnic invaders who occupied eastern Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan and who gradually became Iranized in culture after their conquest. This has been confirmed recently by the discovery of a seal inscription which calls a certain Lord Ularg as firstly king of the Huns and then Kushan-shah.²⁰ The Kidarite appropriation of Kushan symbolism and claims to be the heirs to the Kushan legacy should be seen in the light of a long process of acculturation and the White Hunnic Kidarite adaptation to their new environment. Priscus (fr. 33 and fr. 41),²¹ a contemporary fifth century Roman source, calls them without any hint of ambiguity or generalization Huns and names the contemporary Kidarite king Khunkas. Tremblay notes that the etymology for this name is most likely to be X(y)on-qan, i.e. Hun Khan (Khan of the Huns).²²

The Chinese source the *Bei Shi* tells us that a king called Kidara (either a personal name or more likely the attribution of the name of the dynasty to an individual king) conquered the territory north and south of the Hindu Kush (i.e. Afghanistan) some time before 410 AD and had subjected the Gandhara region (northeastern Afghanistan and northern Pakistan) to Hunnic rule.²³ From there the Kidarites became a threat to the Gupta Empire of India (ca. 320–550 AD). During the reign of the Indian Gupta king Kumaragupta I (413–455 AD) the Kidarites pushed into the Punjab (northwestern India). These Kidarites, who were the first major dynasty to rule the White Hun state in Central Asia, were by this stage under increasing pressure from another dynasty, the above mentioned Hephthalites, and were gradually ejected from their northern territories in Sogdia (Uzbekistan) and Bactria (northern Afghanistan) some time in the fifth century AD. They were finally destroyed in the Gandhara region by the Hephthalites towards the end of the fifth century, sometime between 477 AD (the date of their last embassy to the Tuoba Wei) and 520 AD (when Gandhara is definitely under Hephthalite control according to a Chinese pilgrim).

Before that dramatic ending the Kidarites invaded India repeatedly during the time of the Gupta monarch Skandagupta (455–67 AD). The Bhitari pillar inscription dating from the end of the reign of Skandagupta tells of how during the preceding reign of Kumaragupta I, the Hunas (Kidarites) almost destroyed the Gupta state. The hapless Kumaragupta passed over control of the defeated Gupta army to his more competent son Skandagupta. However, even he had troubles coping with the Hunnic invasion. The inscriptions describe how Skandagupta had to reestablish his lineage 'that had been made to

totter', encounter many dangers and hardships that forced him even to 'spend a night sleeping on the bare earth'.²⁴ Skandagupta claims that he vanquished the Hunas and conquered the whole world, but even after this alleged Gupta triumph the Huns remained in control of much of the Punjab and the Guptas permanently lost control of much of their western territories, leading one to wonder how real and decisive these Gupta claims to victory over the Huns actually were. It was most probably the intrusion of the Hephthalites into Kidarite territory that allowed the Guptas a brief respite from Hunnic invasions, not any decisive Indian military triumph over the Huns.

As mentioned earlier, the scholarly research on the Hephthalites who replaced the Kidarites as the ruling clan of the White Hun state was equally preoccupied with the question of the origins of this second Hunnic dynasty. We have already discussed the contentious issue of whether they were new arrivals or part of the initial wave of Hunnic migration into southern Central Asia. Another vexing question for many was again the issue of race. Were the Hephthalites mainly Turco-Mongol (Mongoloid) or Iranian (Caucasoid) in ethnic-racial composition? In the first half of the twentieth century Marquart (1903) and Grousset thought they were Mongols. McGovern also in the early twentieth century and La Vaissière (2007) argued for a Turkic identity, which is likely to be correct, while Enoki (1959) argued for an Iranian origin. Given the heterogeneous nature of steppe political entities and dynasties, all of the above mentioned ethnicities and 'racial' groups were probably represented in some way in the White Hun Hephthalite state.

They themselves of course claimed to be Huns and that is how they were also known to their immediate neighbours. The Hunnic origin or self-identification of the Hephthalite dynasty is reflected in the form OIONO or HIONO, which appears in their coinage.²⁵ The confusion concerning their identity results largely from the multiple and conflicting origin theories provided by our Chinese sources mentioned briefly above. The *Wei Shu* (102.2278–9), for instance, suggests both an Iranian origin via the Yuezhi and a Turkish alternative via Gaoche. The Iranian origin of the Hephthalites vouched for most prominently by the renowned Japanese Inner Asian scholar Enoki, has now been largely discredited due to the discovery that the so-called Hephthalite language with Iranian affinities, used to justify the Iranian theory, was not introduced by the Hephthalites themselves, but was the indigenous language of the region conquered by the Hephthalites.²⁶ One could therefore justifiably dismiss the reference to the Yuezhi in the *Wei Shu* reference above as simply an anachronism common in Chinese historiography.

However, the confusion in the Chinese sources is in all likelihood

actually indicative of the real ethnic heterogeneity of the Hephthalite state and even its elite. It is likely that the Hephthalite Hunnic state contained a core of largely Turkic speaking military elite, which was rapidly being influenced by Iranian and also Indian cultural practices and languages. At least a partially Mongolic speaking dominant core group might also be a possibility, if we were to accept the Hua = Var = Wuhuan identification suggested by Pulleyblank. Pulleyblank (1983), Golden (1992) and Czeglédy (1983) all hint at the possibility that the Mongolic Var (Hua) tribes, along with the presumably Turkic Huns, may have constituted the ruling core of the Hephthalite state and that these Var were connected to the Wuhuan confederacy of Inner Mongolia. As an indication of this, Pulleyblank notes the striking similarities in headdress and hairstyles between the Wuhuan and the Hephthalites²⁷ (not particularly convincing evidence for determining ethnic origins).

A powerful Iranian cultural influence on the ruling elite also cannot be ruled out. Known Hephthalite personal names certainly give this impression. They seem to be for the most part Iranian (though alternative Turkic etymologies are also sometimes offered by experts), indicating a high degree of cultural and probably ethnic fusion between Turco-Mongol Huns and native Iranians. The same heterogeneity was of course, as already highlighted, a characteristic feature of the earlier Xiongnu and also the European Huns whom we will discuss shortly. In any case, one of the last Hephthalite rulers to be recorded in history, a certain Nizak (or Tirek) who ruled in the region of Badghis (in western Afghanistan), bore the title Tarkhan, which incidentally was originally a Xiongnu title. The fact that the Hephthalites referred to themselves as Huns argues definitively against an Iranian, sedentary origin in Badakhshan (northern Afghanistan). However, the Iranization of the Hephthalites and the presence of an Iranian element in their confederacy from very early on are certainly possible.

The Persians would call both the Kidarite Huns and Hephthalite Huns collectively as Chionites. Despite objections by some, most historians now agree that the Chionites and the Huns were one and the same.²⁸ The arrival of these Chionites (the Kidarites) had serious consequences for the history of Iran. In 350 AD the Sassanian king Shapur II had to abandon his siege of the Roman fortress of Nisibis in order to deal with the new threat emerging on his empire's eastern borders. The war against these new enemies lasted for eight long years (350–358 AD) and Shapur somehow managed to end hostilities by forging an uneasy alliance with the Huns. The benefit of this alliance was the provision of Hunnic military aid to the Persians. Shapur used his newly won Hunnic allies to augment his army in the siege of

Amida in 360 AD. During the siege Grumbates, the king (probably a sub-king) of the Chionites (his name being possibly Kurum-pat: Turkish, ruling prince), lost his son.²⁹ The unfortunate Romans within the city then had to bear the brunt of the rage of the infuriated Hunnic king.

By the subsequent reign of Bahram IV the Sassanians, having suffered repeated defeats, had lost almost all of their eastern Iranian lands (which Sassanian Persia had seized earlier from the Kushans) to the White Huns under the Kidarites. Only the strategic oasis city of Merv (in modern Turkmenistan) remained of Persia's eastern possessions.³⁰ To make matters worse Persia was forced to pay a regular tribute to the Huns. The Sassanian king Yazdegard II (reigned 438–57) ca. 442 AD halted the humiliating tribute payments and attempted to reverse the defeats the Sassanians had suffered at the hands of the Kidarite Huns. By 450 AD the Persians seem to have managed to push their way into either Tokharistan/Bactria (namely the city/region of Taliqan in northeastern Afghanistan near the city of Balkh) or more probably an adjacent region further to the west.

The sudden success enjoyed by the Persians over the Huns in the 440s and 450s (after nearly a century of constant one-sided battering at the hands of the Huns) requires explanation and one explanatory factor is very easy to identify. It has already been noted above that the Kidarite invasions of India intensified during this very period and that this was due mainly to Hephthalite pressure which was building against the Kidarites. The Kidarites at this time found themselves trapped in a pincer attack by the Hephthalites and the Sassanians, hence the increased urgency to find an escape route into India during these decades. This pattern of Inner Asian peoples invading India to escape conquest by a more powerful Inner Asian group would be repeated throughout the later history of India, the most famous example being the famous Timurid Mughal conquest of India. The Mughals of the sixteenth century AD were pushed south by the more powerful Shaybanid Uzbeks from the north.

Around 456 AD or slightly earlier around 454 AD the Persian king Yazdegard was feeling confident enough to demand reverse tribute from the Kidarite Huns. The Huns refused to comply and in a major engagement that followed the Persians suffered another decisive defeat, which reversed all previous Persian gains in the preceding decade. To make matters worse a bitter civil war erupted shortly afterwards within the beleaguered Persian Empire. The next Sassanian king Peroz (reigned 457–84) overcame his brother Hormizd and seized the Persian throne with the support of an army provided by the Hephthalite Huns. In order to repay the Hephthalites for their assistance, Peroz may have ceded the formerly Kidarite possession of

Taliquan (wherever the city was located, see above) to the Hephthalites.

The Kidarites, sensing Persian weakness, renewed their offensive against the Persians and in 464 AD the desperate Peroz even resorted to asking the Eastern Romans for financial aid against the Kidarites, a request which was haughtily refused by Constantinople. In order to buy time and to appease the Kidarites Peroz offered the Kidarite ruler Khunkhas his sister in marriage. According to Priscus, Peroz resorted to subterfuge and sent a woman of lowly status rather than his sister as wife to Khunkhas. The Hunnic king soon discovered the deception and sought revenge. He invited 300 Persian officers to his realm and then murdered or mutilated them in order to humiliate Peroz. War was renewed and the balance was tipped in favour of the Persians when once again the Hephthalites intervened on the side of the Persians. The allies captured the Kidarite capital of Balaam (possibly Balkh?) in 467 AD and the Kidarties retreated to Gandhara where their rule was later extinguished by the Hephthalites.

WHITE HUNNIC EMPIRE AT ITS ZENITH UNDER THE HEPHTHALITE DYNASTY

The cooperation between the Hephthalites and the Persians against a common enemy, the Kidarites, would not survive the demise of the Kidarites. The Hephthalites seized the Kidarite territory that the Persians had taken and assumed leadership of all the White Huns. Peroz attempted to take back those lands, but he was resoundingly defeated by a Hephthalite king called Akhshunwar (or Khushnavaz).³¹ Peroz was captured by the Huns on two occasions and managed to escape death by agreeing to pay a huge ransom-tribute and sending one of his sons to the Hephthalite court as a hostage. Persia had now again been reduced to the status of a vassal state to the Huns. Peroz, however, had still not learnt his lesson and tried his luck against the Huns once again. According to Procopius (1.3.1–22; 1.4.1–14) he was slain with most of his army in a disastrous battle with the Hephthalites in 484 AD. The historian Agathias (4.27.3–4, a sixth century AD East Roman source)³² provides much the same information as Procopius and emphasizes again that the Hephthalites were a Hunnic people. These triumphs over the Sassanians made the name of the Hephthalite Huns a terror to the Persians and other Iranian peoples.

The victorious Hephthalites then proceeded to intervene in Sassanian internal affairs. In 488 AD Kavād, one of Peroz's surviving sons, elicited support from his White Hunnic Hephthalite overlords.

The Huns married Kavād to either the daughter or sister of the reigning Hunnic king and then provided him with the necessary military aid to gain the Sassanian throne.³³ Kavād was forced to seek refuge with the Hephthalites yet again ten years later due to a revolt. The Hephthalites supplied him with 30,000 men to reclaim his kingdom. However, the price for this aid was high. Kavād was forced to cede more territory to the Huns and pay an increased annual tribute. Part of the Sassanian coinage was countermarked with a Hephthalite sign signaling that they were destined as tribute to the Hunnic king³⁴ and the Hephthalite kings claimed that they were the legitimate rulers of Iran, the Sassanians being merely their vassals. The Persian king Kavād, increasingly short of funds, asked the East Romans, with whom Persia had relatively good relations for about half a century (which was largely due to Hunnic pressure which prevented the Persians from upsetting the Romans, and vice versa, the Romans the Persians due to the European Hunnic threat, rather than any new amicable intentions on the part of the two powers), for loans. The Romans, just as they had refused the request from his father Peroz before him, arrogantly rebuffed Kavād. In 502 AD Kavād renewed the ancient hostilities between the two empires in order to avenge his humiliation.³⁵

The Persians would continue to pay tribute to the Huns from 484 AD to the 550s AD during the reign of Khusrau I (531–79 AD). With the Persians subjected the Hephthalite Hunnic Empire now reached the zenith of its power. The Hephthalites proceeded to expand east as well. In the last decade of the fifth century AD Kashgar and Khotan were occupied and between 497 AD and 509 AD Karashahr and the region of modern day Urumchi (all regions in Xinjiang in western China) fell to the Hephthalite Huns. Nearly all of Eastern and Western Turkestan were now in Hephthalite hands. The Chinese historical records mention the vast extent of the Hephthalite White Hunnic Empire. The *Liangshu* 54 lists among their domains Persia, Kashmir, Karashahr, Kucha, Kashgar and Khotan and the *Bei Shi* 97 names Kangju (Sogdia), Khotan, Kashgar and Persia.³⁶ More than thirty lands to the west of China are seen as being subject to the White Huns in our sources.

After also conquering the Kidarites in Gandhara and northwestern India in the late fifth century AD, the Hephthalites began their invasions of India during the reign of King Budhagupta of the declining Gupta Empire of India in the last quarter of the fifth century. In the early sixth century AD a Hephthalite sub-king by the name of Toramana, who was called by the Indians ‘the boundlessly famed ruler of the earth’, conquered all of western India penetrating as far east as modern day Madhya Pradesh and completely dominating Uttar

Pradesh, Rajputana, Punjab, and Kashmir. His son Mihirakula became the ruler of virtually the whole of northern India. His capital in India seems to have been Sakala (modern Sialkot in Pakistan). His cruelty however is said to have incited the vassalized Indians to rebel against him. He somehow ended up in the custody of a certain Baladitya (possibly a Gupta ruler or magnate). In the meantime the brother of Mihirakula usurped the Hunnic throne.

By the second quarter of the sixth century AD the Hephthalite Hunnic Empire was probably the most extensive empire in the world. In the east it extended as far as Urumchi in modern day Xinjiang, in the south central India, in the north the steppes of Kazakhstan and in the west up to the borders of the Eastern Roman Empire via its vassals the Sassanian Persians. However, the glory of the Central Asian Huns would be numbered in the middle of the sixth century AD when a new power emerged in the east, the Göktürks. The Hephthalites had been linked in some way to the powerful Rouran Khaganate in Mongolia in the early stages of their rise. Chinese sources suggest that they were initially the vassals of the Rouran before becoming independent. By the middle of the sixth century AD the Rouran Khaganate was overthrown by the Göktürk Khaganate and the new rulers of the eastern steppes, the Turks, now sought to conquer the Hephthalites as well.

The Sassanian Persians who had been seeking an opportunity to cast off the Hunnic yoke tried to form an alliance with the Göktürks against their Hephthalite overlords. The Turkish Khagan reacted swiftly and a mighty Göktürk army seized the city of Tashkent and then engaged the Hephthalite army under King Gatfar near Bukhara. A titanic struggle ensued, a gigantic eight-day battle involving contingents drawn from nearly every Inner Asian nationality. The result was the complete defeat of the Hephthalite Huns. The Turks duly occupied Transoxiana from the retreating Hephthalites who elected a new king called Faganish (also called Afganish) as they fled south. The Hephthalites were now, however, trapped between the Persians and the Turks and the last Hephthalite king surrendered to King Khusrau of Persia sometime between 560 and 563 AD.

LATER HUNNIC STATES IN CENTRAL ASIA AND SOUTH ASIA

Yet, this was not the end of the history of the Huns in Central Asia and India. Their history from this point onwards, though equally fascinating, however, becomes even more difficult to reconstruct due to the increasing sparsity of primary source material and the great

divergence in opinion among scholars who have visited this topic. Only tentative assumptions can at this stage be made about these final centuries of Hunnic presence in Central Asia and India. It is hoped that further research on this particularly understudied subject of history will lead to a better understanding of the later 'Hephthalites' and 'Hunas' who appear sporadically in our sources.

After the collapse of the Hephthalite White Hunnic Empire, disputes immediately arose between the Turks and Sassanians over control of former Hephthalite lands and peoples. During this Turk-Sassanian rivalry White Hunnic or partially White Hunnic polities emerged out of the ruin of the Hephthalite Empire in areas which now correspond to modern Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan. In the early decades of the seventh century AD Sassanian Persian power in the east went into terminal decline and all former Hephthalite territories in Afghanistan as well as lands to the north of the Oxus (Amu Darya) river (which had been occupied by the Göktürks earlier in the preceding sixth century AD) fell under Western Turkish overlordship (the Göktürk Khaganate by this stage having split into two separate Eastern and Western Turkish Empires). The Turks in some cases imposed new rulers on the White Huns, but in parts of Afghanistan minor Hephthalite dynasties may have continued to rule under Western Turkish overlordship.

Due to the mixing of newly arrived Göktürks with the original Huns (both peoples being Inner Asian in origin) during this period of Western Turkish over-lordship, it becomes increasingly difficult from the early seventh century AD onwards to distinguish which state/dynasty is Hunnic and which is Western Turkish in origin. In former Hephthalite territory what was happening was probably the common Inner Asian phenomenon of new ruling dynasties being superimposed on an older, established, military elite, in this case still largely Hephthalite White Hunnic. So just as the Kidarite dynasty had been displaced earlier by the Hephthalite dynasty in the previous fifth century AD, now in the late sixth and early seventh centuries AD Western Turkic ruling families progressively displaced former Hephthalite rulers, but continued to reign over pretty much the same agglomeration of Hunnic peoples with no doubt certain, important, new injections of Inner Asian tribes added to the mix. Just as the White Huns claimed the heritage of earlier Kushans and utilized Kushan titles and symbolism to legitimize their rule, these new Western Turk dynasts also at times seem to have claimed White Hunnic Hephthalite heritage and utilized Hunnic titles and traditions to gain the support of the largely Hunnic elites of the regions they came to control.

The Western Turkish Khaganate, which dominated Central Asia,

soon fell into chaos due to internal strife and the pressure exerted on it from the east by the formidable Tang dynasty of China in the middle of the seventh century AD. At the same time the western territories of the Turks in southern Central Asia were exposed to new Arab Muslim invasions. Around 719 AD a possibly Hephthalite king by the name of Tish the 'One-eyed', taking advantage of the Arab invasion of Central Asia which had weakened the authority of the Turk *yabghu* (ruler) of Tokharistan (corresponding to roughly northern Afghanistan), established control over most of Tokharistan and declared himself king of much of northern Afghanistan and parts of Tajikistan with the title of Yabghu. These presumably Hephthalite kings (or Western Turkish rulers claiming the heritage of the Hephthalites and ruling over former Hephthalite Huns) would continue to rule in this region until the middle of the eighth century AD. In 729 AD a king whose name seems to have been Qutlugh Ton Tardu sent an embassy to the Tang court in Changan to solicit aid against the Arabs. In 758 AD the last 'Hephthalite' king of Tokharistan whose name is known to history, a certain Wu-na-to, arrived at the Chinese capital.³⁷ His realm seems to have been swallowed up by the Arabs by this time.

The Hephthalite Hunnic struggle against the Muslims also took place further west. The Arabs had defeated the surviving Hephthalites in the Herat region of western Afghanistan in the second half of the seventh century AD. However, a Hephthalite (or Hunnified Western Turkish) ruler with the title Tarkhan named Nizak (or Tirek according to some scholars) led the Huns and other groups against the new conquerors in the early eighth century AD in the Herat and Badkhis regions. After this resistance had been crushed by the Arabs and the presumably Hunnic kings of Tokharistan also vanquished, Muslim supremacy in northern and western Afghanistan became uncontested.

Curiously, however, the famous medieval Khalaj tribe of Afghanistan is thought by some scholars to be the remnants of these vanquished Hephthalite Huns. Others argue that these tribesmen were not Huns in origin, but Turks settled in the region by the Western Turks in the seventh century AD or earlier. Yet, as pointed out earlier, the introduction of new Turkish tribal elements and ruling clans often went hand-in-hand with the merging of these new elements with the more numerous local White Huns. It is thought that some of these 'Turks', who doubtlessly included strong Hunnic elements, later merged with the local Pashtuns to form the dominant Ghilzai Pashtuns of Afghanistan,³⁸ a group that is renowned to this day for their ferocious warrior tradition and their spirited resistance against successive waves of invaders including the Safavid Persians in the eighteenth century, the British in the nineteenth, the Soviets in the twentieth and finally the Americans in the twenty-first century.

Elements of these Pashtunized Huns/Turks were also the later founders of the Khilji/Ghilji dynasty that ruled the Delhi Sultanate of India in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries AD.

In India and Pakistan too the Hephthalite Hunnic legacy lived on long after the destruction of the Hephthalite Empire in Central Asia. In Gandhara and Kashmir a White Hunnic ruler called Pravarasena seems to have succeeded to the inheritance of the Hun king Mihirakula and ruled in the middle of the sixth century AD, building a city named after himself (Pravarasenapura, modern Srinagar) and the great temple of Pravaresha. He is said to have been succeeded by King Gokarna, a follower of the god Shiva, and then by a ruler called Narendraditya Khinkhila who may have exercised control over a large area stretching from Kashmir to Kabul in the late sixth century AD. Khinkhila was then apparently succeeded by King Yudhishtira, who seems to have been the last independent Hephthalite Hunnic ruler of northwestern India. According to the differing interpretations of the available evidence, he (or perhaps his predecessor) was either forced to submit to the Western Turks around 625 AD and then eliminated before 630 AD or alternatively continued to rule in some capacity until the middle of the seventh century AD. Remnants of the same Hephthalite ruling family may have remained in power, albeit in dependent positions, in parts of Kashmir and other areas after the final demise of the main imperial dynasty. Meanwhile some time later in the seventh century AD in Kabul-Kapisa and Gandhara a new dynasty, possibly of White Hunnic origin (or perhaps a Western Turkic dynasty, claiming the legacy of the Hephthalites), called the 'Turk' Shahis took over and continued to reign until the mid ninth century AD.³⁹

Because of the dearth of evidence available and due to the persistent instability in Afghanistan that continues to hinder further valuable archaeological research, it is difficult to say at present what the exact origins of the Shahi were. What we do know is that this at least partially Hunnic Shahi kingdom of eastern Afghanistan and northern Pakistan also struggled against the Arabs. The Arabs after conquering Sistan in the 650s AD started to make inroads into Shahi territory. Kabul soon fell to their onslaught. However, the Shahi counter-attacked and almost immediately drove the Muslims out of not only Kabul, but also Zabulistan (the area around Ghazni) and ancient Arachosia (Kandahar). The Arab general Yazid b. Ziyad was killed in battle while trying to win back Zabulistan and the Arab invasion of Kabul in 697–8 AD was decisively repulsed. The subsequent kings of Zabul, who may have been relatives of the Shahi rulers of Kabul and Gandhara and who, like the Shahi, seem to have used Hephthalite titles, would continue to defy the Arabs thereafter.

The Shahi kingdom from 719 AD was ruled by a certain Tegin Shah.

Around 739 AD Tegin abdicated the throne in favour of his son Fromo Kesaro, who some speculate may have been named in honour of the Roman Caesar. The Caesar in question may have been the ruler of the Eastern Roman Empire, Leo III the Isaurian, whose embassy is thought to have passed through Central Asia in 719 AD. The Eastern Romans, while passing through, possibly conveyed news about their great victory over the Arabs in 717 AD. The Shahi may have appreciated this Roman success against their common Muslim enemy and named their crown prince 'Caesar'. This Fromo Kesaro (reigned ca. 739–46 AD) would win a great victory over the Arabs and claim to have imposed 'taxes' (probably some form of payment) on the Muslims. It is speculated by scholars that the story of Kesaro's heroic career and victories over the Arabs may have contributed to the forging of the famous Tibetan legend of King Phrom Ge-sar, whose exploits were celebrated in a massive epic poem. The Shahi kingdom of eastern Afghanistan would however eventually fall to the Muslim onslaught in the late ninth century AD. Kabul, Zabul and Kandahar were all lost to the Muslims, while Gandhara came under the rule of a possibly new dynasty that would be called Hindu Shahi, rather than Turk Shahi. The later Hephthalites and their descendants were gradually Indianized and Pashtunized, so that by the time of the Shahi these formerly Turkic Huns of Afghanistan and Pakistan were able to present themselves to their subjects as de facto native rulers of the regions they controlled. Their role in the preservation of India's Hindu culture and civilization will be discussed later on.

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION AND CULTURE OF THE WHITE HUNS

Little is known about the political organization of these Central Asian Huns. However, from the scant information we do possess we can note the fact that the political practices of these Huns were remarkably similar to those of the European Huns. The White Hun state possessed an administrative apparatus at both central and local levels. It was in essence a typical Inner Asian tributary empire ruling over many local dependent states and fiefs. In Hephthalite inscriptions we encounter titles such as *oazorko*, *fromalaro*, *hazaroxto* and *asbarobido* (the last indicating the military commander of cavalry).⁴⁰ As among the European Huns and the Xiongnu, the succession to the Hephthalite White Hunnic throne could pass from uncle to nephew, rather than from father to son (which mirrors the succession of Bleda and Attila among the European Huns to the throne after their uncles Ruga and Octar).⁴¹ The White Huns also practised artificial cranial deformation

which was practised among the elite of the European Huns and Alans.⁴²

They furthermore possessed the familiar Xiongnu Hun system of appointing vassal kings (a practice also found among the European Huns), e.g. the king of Zabulistan who ruled an almost autonomous fief within the empire and was instrumental in spearheading the Hephthalite conquest of northwestern India. As in the old Xiongnu Empire collective governance of the state was practised by several high ranking aristocrats (with new titles such as *yabghus* (borrowed probably from either the Kangju or Kushans) and *tegins*).⁴³ In India the Kidarites and then the Hephthalite Huns also introduced the rule of multiple rajas and rajputs who held territories in 'fief' to their common overlord the Hunnic supreme king or emperor. Thus a form of quasi-feudalism was introduced to India and a transformation in the administration of revenues took place.⁴⁴

The Kidarites are known to have created conditions favourable to international trade and they maintained the monetary and economic system of the regions they conquered without disturbing them. In fact Hunnic rule of Central Asia marked the beginning of the golden age of Sogdian cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Paykend and Panjikent,⁴⁵ which in many ways exposes the hollowness of the legend of Hunnic 'destructiveness'. In Khwarezm (northwestern Uzbekistan) at sites such as Barak-tam Hunnic rulers erected two-storey castles with ceremonial halls and carpets in a style that is, according to the great Inner Asian archaeologist Tolstov who excavated the site, distinct and different from previous local structures. The symbiosis and also dichotomy between the dominant ruling steppe pastoralist, i.e. the Huns who constituted much of the imperial army and high-ranking nobility, and the conquered sedentary local population seems to have persisted throughout the Hunnic period (both Kidarite and Hephthalite). However, the upper elite of the White Huns seems to have adapted to local conditions and traditions fairly quickly, readily absorbing elements of Kushan-Indian, Sassanian Persian and Sogdian cultures, especially in their art and architecture. Many Hephthalites, as Litvinsky has shown, were also only semi-nomadic/pastoralists as evidenced by archaeological sites such as the town of Kafyr-qala (southern Tajikistan) in which large quantities of Hephthalite coins, sealings and even inscriptions have been discovered, clearly indicative of an extended Hephthalite presence. The famous giant Buddhas of Bamiyan in Afghanistan, which tragically were destroyed by the infamous Taliban, were probably built under White Hunnic rule and these Buddhas together with other marvellous artefacts discovered in the same area are a testament to White Hunnic religious pluralism, cultural sophistication and cosmopolitanism. The coinage of the White

Huns shows an astonishing multi-lingualism employing legends inscribed in Sogdian, Middle Persian, Bactrian and Brahmi. The Hephthalites are also known to have used Bactrian, Pahlavi, Kharosthi and Brahmi.

Like the Hunnic-Germanic kings of Europe who we will encounter later in the book, these Huns of Central Asia were keen to present themselves as legitimate heirs to the preceding rulers of the regions they conquered. In the case of the Kidarites in particular, as mentioned briefly above, the legacy of the Kushans seems to have been treated with particular care and attention, so much so that these Hunnic kings claimed to be the heirs to the Kushan kings. The rhetoric of the restoration of the Kushan state may have been a very clever propaganda tool employed by the Kidarite Huns to gain the loyalty of their new subjects. Just a century prior to the Hunnic arrival the Kushans had been overwhelmed by the Persian Sassanians. The propaganda suited the new Hunnic conquerors well and gave them a certain legitimacy in the eyes of the local population.

HUNNIC IMPACT ON IRAN AND INDIA

The conquest of the White Huns had a lasting impact on the histories of both Iran and India. The Sassanian Persians suffered not only military humiliation and vassalage at the hands of the Huns, but also as a direct consequence of their defeats suffered a crisis of legitimacy.⁴⁶ Before the Hunnic period the Sassanians had legitimated their overthrow of the preceding Parthian Arsacid dynasty and their usurpation of royal power by appealing to their record of military success against the Romans. Victory over the traditional aggressor (Rome), which had repeatedly sacked the Iranian capital of Ctesiphon in the second and third centuries AD and against whom the Arsacids had been increasingly impotent, was held up as the legitimizing standard of the new Sassanian dynasty. However, the embarrassing defeats suffered by the Sassanians at the hands of the Huns and the reality of the self-proclaimed ruler of both Iran and non-Iran, the Sassanian king, having to play second fiddle and pay tribute to his Hunnic overlord seriously shook the very foundations of Sassanian legitimacy based on the notion of being the victorious defender of a superior Iran against foreign enemies.⁴⁷

The Sassanians had to come up with a new ideology to buttress their legitimacy in the eyes of the Iranian aristocracy and people. What appeared was the 'national' history (or rather propagandistic pseudo-history) of Iran constructed around the mythical deeds of the legendary forebears of the Sassanians, the Kayanian kings. This legendary history was recast and reshaped to address pressing

contemporary concerns. The Sassanians manipulated the traditional religion of Iran, Zoroastrianism, to reinvent themselves as the legitimate descendants of the legendary Kayanian kings,⁴⁸ whom they argued were universal kings from whom even the Romans were ultimately derived. The eventual triumph of the Kayanians, after many hardships, in these legends over their arch enemies the Turanians (now equated with the Turkic peoples threatening Iran to the east, i.e. the Kidarite and Hephthalite Huns) helped alleviate somewhat the humiliating reality of Sassanian vassalage to the Huns and excuse the devastating defeats of the king of kings at the hands of the Huns. The reasoning being that the great holy Kayanians had to undergo a similar ordeal. What mattered was 'legitimacy'.

The fictitious Kayanid lineage of the Sassanians served the purpose of instilling within the Persian population, especially the Parthian nobles who were artificially inserted into the fictitious Kayanid descent system, a sense of reverence for the dynasty and more importantly of promoting absolute obedience to the Sassanian ruler. The tradition of the Kayanian kings was useful in promoting the ideology of a well-ordered, autocratic state. The tradition at every turn emphasized loyalty to the ruler and stressed the need to maintain a strict distinction between social classes, since discrimination was considered a necessary condition for a stable and orderly society. It was argued that class confusion and the elimination of class differentiation would undermine the social order. Discrimination was given the official stamp of approval by being attributed to great antiquity to add credibility to an otherwise specious argument. Political dissenters like the Mazdakites were rejected as heretics and ruthlessly persecuted, since their doctrine seems to have advocated the blurring of the distinction between classes of men.

The patriotic 'universalism' and 'quasi-nationalism' of the Zoroastrian Kayanid lineage system, which was in effect recreated due to the historic circumstance of Hunnic domination, helped shape the future political order of Sassanian Iran and contributed mightily to the creation of medieval 'Iranian' identity. Within the universalizing rhetoric of the Sassanians there was no place for the ethnic specificity of the Parthians for instance. In the pseudo-history that the Sassanians articulated the Parthians and other regional/ethnic rulers became 'historical' 'Persians' who owed loyalty and obedience to the Kayanid house. They all became Iranians.

The eventual destruction of the Hunnic Hephthalite Empire at the hands of the Göktürks in the mid sixth century AD, in which the Sassanians opportunistically participated, vindicated the dynastic myth of Kayanian legitimacy and triumph in the face of adversity. This new myth would help sustain Iranian identity in later history

when Iran again found itself under the yoke of another foreign enemy, the Muslim Arabs. Ironically the experience of the Hunnic yoke facilitated the strengthening of an Iranian identity that would defy assimilation to later conquerors and invaders who would dominate Iran.

In India, as mentioned briefly above, the Kidarite and Hephthalite invasions led to the creation of a new political order. The enigmatic, possibly Hunnic states of western India and Afghanistan like the Turk Shahi realm of Kabul and Gandhara also effectively blocked the invasions of the Arab Muslims into India from the northwest. Although it is not certain, it also seems likely that the formidable Gurjara Pratihara regime (ruled from the seventh–eleventh centuries AD) of northern India, had a powerful White Hunnic element. The Gurjara Pratiharas who were likely created from a fusion of White Hunnic and native Indian elements ruled a vast empire in northern India and they also halted Arab Muslim expansion into India via Sind for centuries, thereby safeguarding India’s Hindu religion and cultural traditions from Islamization. The Muslims would eventually break through under the Turkic Ghaznavids when both the Shahis and the Gurjaras began to decline in the tenth century AD. However, by then the militant process of conversions of most of the Near East and the Iranian world, a characteristic feature of the early Caliphate (Rashidun and Umayyad), was a thing of the past and India’s religious and cultural universe, despite the imposition of Muslim overlords, was able to persist and survive the conquest. The Huns of India and their descendants may have contributed to the preservation of India’s Hindu civilization and culture from Islamization. Some of the Hunas (Huns) in India also seem to have been instrumental in the formation of the famous Rajputs, a people who would be renowned throughout Indian history for their warlike traditions and feats of valour.

TABLE 3.1 Hunnic states in Eurasia

East Asia	Central Asia	South Asia	Europe
<i>Xiongnu Empire</i> (3rd century BC–1st century AD in Mongolia, northern and western China, southern Siberia) <i>Southern Xiongnu</i> (1st century AD–4th century AD in northern China)	<i>Northern Xiongnu</i> (1st century AD–4th century AD in the Altai region and Kazakhstan) <i>Yueban Xiongnu</i> (4th century AD–5th century AD in Kazakhstan)	<i>Kidarite-Hephthalite White Hunnic Empire</i> (5th century AD–7th century AD) <i>Turk Shahi Empire</i> (7th century AD–9th century AD in Afghanistan and Pakistan, governed by an elite which was possibly either Hephthalite Hunnic in origin or Western Turks heavily influenced by the Hephthalites) <i>Gurjara Pratihara Empire</i> (7th century AD–11th century AD, origin unclear, but thought to contain a strong Hephthalite Hunnic component)	<i>Hunnic Empire</i> (4th century AD–5th century AD in Eastern and Central Europe) <i>Utigur-Kutrigur Bulgar Huns</i> (5th century AD–6th century AD in Ukraine and southern Russia) <i>Later Bulgarian States:</i> 1. Great Bulgaria (7th century AD in Ukraine and southern Russia) 2. Danubian Bulgarian Empire (7th century AD–11th century AD in the Balkans) 3. Volga Bulgaria (7th century AD–13th century AD in central Russia) <i>Caucasian Huns</i> (6th century AD–? in Dagestan)
<i>Han-Zhao Empire</i> (4th century AD in northern China)	<i>Kidarite-Hephthalite White Hunnic Empire</i> (4th century AD–6th century AD in western and eastern Turkestan, wider Iran and northwestern India)		
<i>Xia Empire</i> (5th century AD in northern China)	<i>Hephthalite remnant states</i> (6th century AD–8th century AD in Afghanistan)		

- 1 Wright (1997), 96; Pulleyblank (2000b), 93.
- 2 See Pulleyblank (2000b), 91–2.
- 3 Érdy (1995), 21.
- 4 For the best analysis of these sources see La Vaissière (2015), 188.
- 5 La Vaissière (2005), 21.
- 6 Sinor (1990b), 298. See La Vaissière (2007), 121, 125, for a slightly different interpretation.
- 7 Pulleyblank (1983), 453.
- 8 *Historiae* 7, 7–8, ed. C. de Boor, 256, 23–262, 17.
- 9 Var-Huns, Menander, fr. 19.1, Blockley (1985), 174.
- 10 Haussig (1953), 281–90, 347.
- 11 Czeglédy (1983), 34–5.
- 12 Schlütz and Lehmkuhl (2007), 114.
- 13 Érdy (1995), 45.
- 14 See La Vaissière (2007), 121. See also p.124 for the text and translation of the crucial passages in the *Tongdian*, 5259, which provide the definite date for the southward migration of the Huns from the Altai. The passages are based on the much earlier *Wei Shu*.
- 15 Kononov (1977), 62, 75.
- 16 Bivar (1983), 212.
- 17 Pulleyblank (2000b), 92; La Vaissière (2015), 185. See Theophanes 446, 21, Moravcsik (1958), vol. 2, 158–9.
- 18 Pritsak (1954a), 382; (1955b), 259.
- 19 Olympiodorus, fr. 19 (*Bibl. Cod.* 80, 173). See also Moravcsik (1958), vol. 2, 341.
- 20 Ur-Rahman, Grenet, and Sims-Williams (2006), 125–31; Lerner and Sims-Williams, (2011), 72–4.
- 21 Blockley (1983), 336, 346 and 348.
- 22 Tremblay (2001), 188; Grenet (2002), 209. See also Biswas (1973), 15, Bivar (1983), 212, and Frye (1975), 38, who agree that the Kidarties are Huns.
- 23 Zeimal (1996), 122.
- 24 Zeimal (1996), 123.
- 25 Golden (1992), 81.
- 26 See Sims-Williams (2002), 234.
- 27 Pulleyblank (2000b), 92.
- 28 Enoki (1959), 24, probably correctly connects them to the Hun-na-sha (king of the Huns) state/dynasty, who, according to Chinese sources, controlled Sogdia in the late fourth and early fifth centuries AD. See also Frye (1975), 38 and Bivar (1983), 211 on the Chionites.
- 29 Ammianus Marcellinus 16.9.3–4; 19.1.7.
- 30 Payne (2015), 284.
- 31 Bivar (1983), 214; Litvinsky (1996), 139–40.
- 32 Frendo (1975), 130.
- 33 Procopius 1.6.10; Theophanes, AM 5968, Mango and Scott (1997), 189–91.
- 34 Payne (2015), 287; Litvinsky (1996), 140.
- 35 Procopius 1.7.1–3.
- 36 See La Vaissière (2007), 125, and also discussion on the extent of the Hephthalite state in Biswas (1973), 25.
- 37 Harmatta and Litvinsky (1996), 373.
- 38 Dani, Litvinsky and Zamir Safi (1996), 177–82.
- 39 Dani, Litvinsky, and Zamir Safi (1996), 169–72.
- 40 Litvinsky (1996), 146.
- 41 Kollautz and Miyakawa (1970), 98.

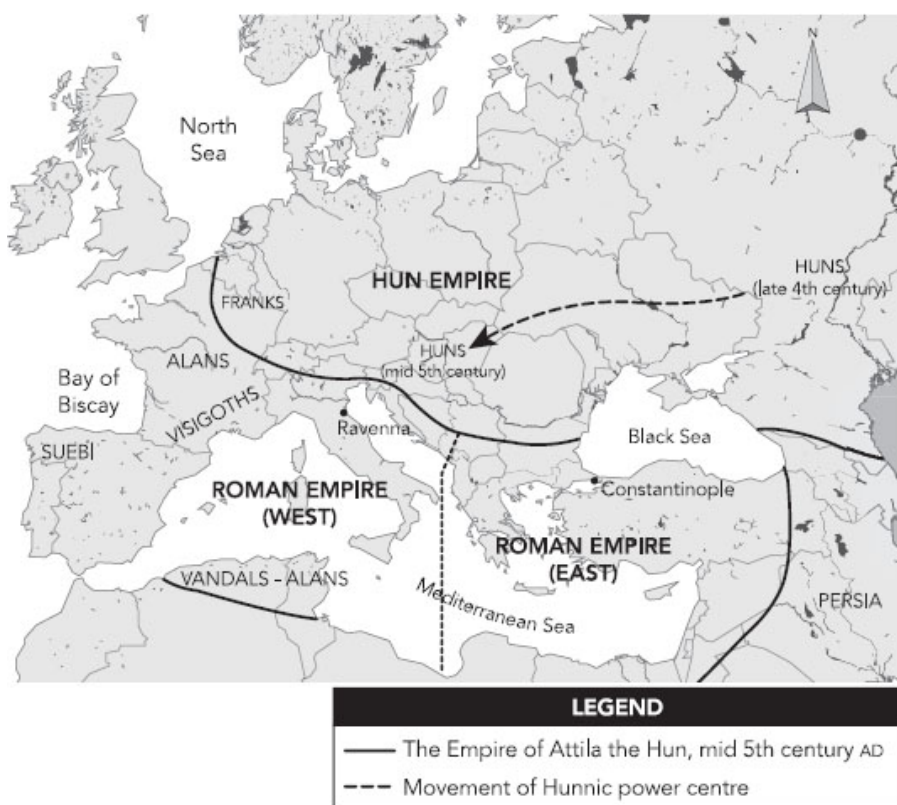
- 42 Frye (1996), 176, and Grenet (2002), 210.
- 43 Grenet (2002), 212; Sims-Williams (2002), 234.
- 44 Dani, Litvinsky and Zamir Safi (1996), 172–3; Chakrabarti (1996), 189. There are possible Kushan (also Inner Asian in origin) precedents for this quasi-feudal structure that the Huns probably built on (p. 194).
- 45 Payne (2015), 286.
- 46 Payne (2015).
- 47 Yarshater (1983), 402–3.
- 48 For the legend of the Kayanian kings see Yarshater (1983), 366–77.

4 THE HUNS OF EUROPE

PRE-HUNNIC HUNS?

The Huns of Europe first appear on the horizons of our Greco-Roman sources in the 370s AD when they famously defeated first the Alans and then the Greutungi and Tervingi Goths in what is now Ukraine and Romania. However, on the basis of etymological conjectures it has been speculated (most notably by Maenchen-Helfen (1973)) that Turkic groups related to the Huns were already active west of the Volga river in Europe much earlier since the second century AD. The speculation was fuelled by the identification of a group called the Khunnoi by Ptolemy (3.5.10), a Greco-Roman geographer in the second century AD, in the vicinity of the Germanic Bastarnae and Sarmatian Roxolani in the Pontic steppes. Were these Khunnoi in some way related to the Huns? The name is certainly strikingly similar and given the fact that Xiongnu (Hunnic) groups are known to have been active in Kazakhstan long before the second century AD, the presence of some splinter groups of Huns or Turkic groups calling themselves Huns in Europe is not beyond the realm of possibility. However, until we possess more definitive evidence, whether archaeological or linguistic, it is not possible to definitively pronounce positively or negatively about this hypothesis.

As we have shown in earlier chapters, the main body of Huns during the second and third centuries AD were situated much further east in the Altai region between Mongolia and Kazakhstan. Between them and the Alans of southern Russia there were the Turkic Dingling tribes. The absorption of these Dingling into the Hunnic state was a long drawn out process, as was probably also the conquest of the Alans in the fourth century AD. Therefore, at present it is not possible to take it for granted that some Turkic groups (maybe related to the Huns) were present in Europe before the arrival of the main Huns in Alan territory.



MAP 4.1 Hun Empire in Europe

EUROPE ON THE EVE OF HUNNIC ARRIVAL

Before the arrival of the Huns the long peninsula stretching out of continental Eurasia, that is Europe, was dominated by three main groups. The first were the various Sarmatian groups including the Alans whom we have discussed in an earlier chapter. With the exception of the powerful Alans centred around what is now the Kuban steppe region in southern Russia, the Sarmatians in the fourth century AD were a politically fragmented and increasingly marginalized group scattered across Eastern and Central Europe. The old Sarmatian heartland of modern Ukraine and Romania was largely in the hands of the predominantly Germanic speaking (though heavily Sarmatianized) Goths. The Goths and other Germanic groups dominated much of Central Europe and parts of Eastern Europe from where they posed a military threat to both the Sarmatians in the east and the Roman Empire to the south and west.

The Germanic tribes of the fourth century AD before the arrival of the Huns had developed a socio-political system that somewhat

mimicked practices found in the steppe zone to the east, but apparently at a more rudimentary stage of evolution. In the major Germanic tribal confederacies there were what appears to be 'over-kings' of some sort and other loose forms of hegemony, e.g. among the Tervingi Goths (in modern Romania) and the Alamanni (southwestern Germany). What is noteworthy is the fact that such loose hegemonies, although they did feature to a certain extent a stronger aristocratic component which allowed for a tighter control of military retainers,¹ was essentially the same type of tribal organization with highly unstable kingship which had existed earlier among the Germanic peoples in the previous first and second centuries AD.²

There is no evidence to show that the Tervingi Gothic, Frankish and Alamannic confederations of the fourth century differed in any significant way in their organization and political structure from the same confederations in the previous third century AD. Greater interaction with the Romans may have rendered these Germanic confederacies more socially complex. However, politically and militarily the Germanic tribes of the fourth century were no stronger or more formidable than their forebears in the third century who had menaced Rome's northern and western frontiers. What is interesting is the fact that there does seem to be indications that Germanic tribal groups in the east (mainly the two branches of Goths) had become much stronger and better organized than those in the western parts (e.g. the Franks and the Alemanni) by the second half of the fourth century AD.

Even more striking is the gap in organizational sophistication between the eastern and western branch of the Goths themselves. The Goths of the west, the Tervingi, like other Germanic tribes further to the west, were ruled by numerous, largely independent, tribal chiefs (the so-called *reguli*), who only occasionally (usually out of military necessity) obeyed the authority of an overlord called *iudex*. We learn from the Roman church historian Socrates that there were frequent internal disputes and civil wars among the Tervingi tribes, e.g. between those led by a leader called Athanaric and those following a warlord called Fritigern.³ Later the Tervingi in the last decades of the fourth and early fifth centuries AD gradually evolved into the more tightly organized and politically centralized Visigoths. However, this evolution occurred only after their extensive encounters with the eastern Alans and the Huns and after they had adopted mounted warfare and other military-political practices of the steppe region (from the Huns, Alans and possibly also the Greuthungi Goths).⁴

Unlike their more haphazardly organized western cousins, the Greuthungi Goths who inhabited the Pontic steppe (modern Ukraine) possessed the most advanced and centralized political organization of

all the Germanic peoples with an increasing trend within their polity towards associating kingship with a specific dynasty.⁵ This can be clearly seen in the election of Videricus, a grandson of King Ermanaric, as king despite him being a minor (according to the Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus, our principal source for the history of the fourth century AD, 31.3.3). Such tighter organization was due largely to the Greuthungi Goths' early contacts with the Scythian-Sarmatian political culture of the steppe region and their virtual symbiosis with the Sarmatians.⁶ Inter-marriages between the Goths and the Sarmatians, especially among the elite, were widespread and intense acculturation took place between the Goths and Alans/Sarmatians. Prominent Gothic and Alanic figures in the fourth and fifth centuries AD, some of whom we will meet later on in the book, were most often of mixed Alan-Goth heritage. For instance, Aspar, the great Alan general in the service of the Eastern Romans, had a Gothic mother and an Alan father. The East Gothic cavalry commanders who engineered the Visigothic triumph at Adrianople over the Romans, Alatheus and Saphrax, both appear to possess Alanic names, as do the two Gothic kings Odotheus (386 AD) and Radagaisus (405–6 AD, the name Radagaisus is similar to the Sarmatian name Rathagosos, mentioned in an inscription at Olbia) who later try to break out of Hunnic domination with a group of Goths into Roman territory. The Greuthungi Goths and even some of the other East Germanic tribes such as the Vandals and Gepids were in fact so thoroughly Sarmatianized that Procopius in the sixth century AD would argue that they were in fact separate from the Germanic peoples and were originally Sarmatians and Getae.⁷

Many East Gothic ruling clans were also likely of Alan or Sarmatian mixed origin. For instance, the famous clan name Amal (the name of the ruling clan of the East Goths after the break-up of the Hunnic Empire and maybe also before the Hunnic invasion) is likely of Iranian origin, Avestic *ama*: powerful, strong, which is also curiously enough the name of a Mithra deity.⁸ The likelihood of this etymology is confirmed by the information given by the Gothic historian Jordanes (sixth century AD) that the mythical ancestors of the Amal dynasty among whom the figure of Amal, the eponymous ancestor, stands out, were demi-gods.⁹ Further indications of an Alanic/Sarmatian element in the Amal clan can also be found in other parts of Jordanes' history, which tells us that Andag, an Amal of the mid fifth century AD, was married to the sister of Candac, the Alan king.¹⁰ The name Andag, a scion of the Amali, itself is almost certainly a Sarmatian name as the appearance of the Sarmatian name Andaakos in a third century AD Tanais inscription shows.¹¹

The later Ostrogoths (the East Goths of the fifth and sixth centuries

AD), who doubtlessly included the Greuthungi, certainly show all the features typical of steppe peoples: mounted warfare, royal hunts, falconry, shamanism and the wearing of Iranian-Central Asian royal vestments by the powerful royal dynasty of the Amals.¹² This level of familiarity with Central Asian steppe culture and traditions among the Goths was the natural consequence of nearly a hundred years of Hunnic domination of the Goths in the earlier fourth and fifth centuries AD, and the culture of the later Ostrogoths cannot be seen as representing the culture of the Greuthungi before the Hunnic conquest. However, there can be no doubt that the East Goths more than any other Germanic people were heavily exposed to Inner Asian culture and influence even before the Hunnic conquest.

In sharp contrast to the political sophistication of the almost Central Asian steppe kingdom of the Greuthungi Goths, centralization of the kind needed for an organized state structure simply did not exist in other parts of Germania before the arrival of the Huns. Only in times of war did these Germanic tribal confederations of the fourth century show organization that approaches the type of control found among steppe empires. However, even then what is shown is not a cohesive military force with a clear command structure, but rather a loose gathering of numerous *reguli* (petty kings) or rather war chiefs who were *primus inter pares* rather than sovereign rulers. For instance when Chonodomarius, the strongest of the Alamannic chiefs, gathers an army of Alamanni before the battle of Argentoratum in 357 AD, he is given neither magisterial nor official power over the army that has gathered to combat the Romans.¹³ He is shown to be simply the strongest among numerous completely independent chiefs who are categorized by Ammianus, our Roman source, as great or small on the basis of the size of the retinue accompanying the 'king'. Thus Chonodomarius is said to be the equal of his nephew who is accompanying him into battle. Five other 'kings' also possess power that approaches his power, and ten more petty kings (*regales*) who are deemed weaker participate. There are also a host of 'nobles' (*optimatum*) and troops who are fighting not because of state or royal authority that compels them to fight, but partly for pay (*mercede*) and partly because of an agreement (*pacto*) to fight for the kings.¹⁴

The control of these Alamannic 'kings' over their people was so weak that before the battle the 'royals' are bullied into dismounting from their horses by the outraged rank and file for being presumptuous and thinking themselves to be superior to the rest.¹⁵ Followers also force the kings to act in accordance with their wishes as in the case of a certain Vadomarius, who is compelled to join Chonodomarius by his retinue. Another feckless 'king' by the name of Gundomadus is actually killed for dissenting with the majority view.¹⁶

This is certainly not the picture of an organized state entity or even a rudimentary proto-state. As in earlier centuries these so-called Germanic kings of the fourth century were in essence merely the representatives of their respective kin-based clans. Thus kings were called *cynings* among the western Germanic tribes, i.e. ‘the man who represents the *cyn* (kin)’.¹⁷ A similar situation seems to have existed among the slightly more centralized Tervingi Goths in Romania as well. Among them there were also numerous *reiks* who ruled more or less independently over limited territory with associated peoples called the *kuni*. Athanaric the judge (*iudex*) of the Tervingi had only superficial control over the various tribes supposedly under his authority and could not prevent lesser leaders from acting independently or even making their own agreements with the Romans without his authorization.¹⁸ It is only after the Alamanni went through a period of Hunnic domination in the first half of the fifth century that we find evidence for stable kingship being practised among them.

The Franks of the fourth century AD (a confederacy to the north of the Alamanni) were equally as decentralized as the Alamanni. Their confederacy was made up of multiple independent groups such as the Chamavi, Chattuarii, Bructeri and Amsivari. These autonomous groups were controlled by a host of petty kings (*reguli*) and *duces*¹⁹ often in dispute with one another. Thus Arbogast the Frankish war leader is found feuding with the *reguli* Marcomer and Sumno.²⁰ Only among the Germanic tribes that had thoroughly mixed with steppe peoples or were in close proximity to them do we find a more cohesive organization in areas west of the Greuthungi. For instance, Ammianus (17.12.21) tell us that among the Quadi in Central Europe near the Carpathian basin, there was an over-king, a *subregulus*, *optimates et iudices*. This somewhat resembles the type of organization one would expect to find in a steppe confederacy or kingdom and arguably this is no accident, since the Quadi were in close proximity to the Sarmatian Iazyges with whom they interacted on a regular basis.

What is not possible to figure out from this brief account in Ammianus is whether this represents the existence among the Quadi of a clear ranking system of the steppe sort or this is just a reference to various tribal leaders commanding groups of warriors of different sizes. The latter might actually be closer to the picture Ammianus has in mind. It could be that the *subregulus* (sub-petty king) Agilmundus is called such, not because of his rank in a political system of the steppe Central Asian sort, but simply because he is a leader with a smaller retinue than the big *regalis* Vitrodorus. Presumably the *optimates* and *iudices* are leaders with even smaller retinues. A development towards a more unified and hierarchical political structure among the East

Germans under Sarmatian influence in the mid fourth century AD is nevertheless clearly a possibility. Whether the situation among the Quadi (assuming that it does represent some kind of a ranking system) was a permanent state of affairs or merely a reflection of a temporary union such as that found among the Alamanni and Franks to the west in times of crisis or war remains unclear.

The weakness of central authority and loose political integration limited the military effectiveness of these otherwise formidable and martial Germanic tribes (even the Goths) who also in most cases lacked the proper siege weapons to successfully besiege Roman fortified towns.²¹ They thus posed only a marginal threat to the maintenance of Roman political authority. As we shall see later the Hunnic ability to besiege towns in protracted siege warfare would radically alter this situation.²² The Germanic cavalry, of particular importance to Gothic and Vandal armies of the late fourth and fifth centuries, would also develop into a competent fighting force only after the Germanic contacts with and imitation of the tactics of Central Asian invaders, the Huns and Alans. It was of course this steppe style cavalry (Alan and Greuthungi) that brought the Goths their great victory over the Romans at Adrianople.²³

The third and by far the most important power in Europe in mid fourth century AD was of course the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire was without a doubt the superpower of the age and had dominated Western Eurasia and North Africa for hundreds of years prior to the arrival of the Huns. It had weathered a severe military, political and socio-economic crisis in the preceding third century AD. What eventually emerged out of the mayhem of the third century, which saw Persian and Germanic invaders ravage most of the border provinces of the Empire, was a much more bureaucratic state, a better organized military establishment and two separate, though related, Roman Empires in the east and west. The myth propagated by generations of historians about the 'decline' of the Roman Empire, especially in terms of military power since the second century AD (most famously by Gibbon), has now largely been proved false in the light of overwhelming evidence from the fourth and fifth centuries AD, which shows the vitality of the Roman state, particularly its eastern half.

Recent scholarship on the Late Roman Empire has rightly emphasized the strength of the Roman state and its armies vis-à-vis their immediate neighbours the Germanic tribes, who despite their significant military prowess, due to their inability to develop more centralized forms of political control, could still not in the fourth century AD seriously pose a mortal threat to the Romans.²⁴ The Roman Empire of the fourth century AD was as impressive and as

imposing as it had ever been in its earlier history. In terms of administrative organization, bureaucracy and management of military resources, the Empire of the fourth century AD was more sophisticated and arguably more efficient than it had been before. Peter Heather argues for a minimum of an increase by a third of Roman military manpower in the late third to mid fourth century AD, from ca. 300,000 men to anywhere between 400,000 to 600,000 men.²⁵ This estimate is corroborated by ancient sources. John Lydus (*De Mensibus* 1.27) gives a total of 389,704 men in the army under Diocletian and 45,562 in the navy. Agathias (*Hist.*13.7–8) gives the probably exaggerated number of 645,000.

These numbers could well be slightly exaggerated. However, there seems to be no doubt that the army had increased in size. Scholars therefore now argue that the fourth century AD may well have marked the highpoint of Roman imperial rule.²⁶ As Matthews points out, the imperial government of mid fourth century AD was unmatched in all of Greco-Roman history ‘in its scale and complexity of organization’.²⁷ Kelly notes also that there was a noticeable transition from ‘soft’ to ‘hard’ government which brought about an unparalleled centralization of the imperial government which was both more effective and intrusive.²⁸ The expansion of bureaucracy and administrative reorganization obviously meant more taxes, and some modern historians have speculated (on the basis of modern political ideology rather than strict observation of contemporary conditions) that the outwardly impressive administrative reorganizations were actually the root causes of internal decay, population decline and even military collapse. However, the opposite was in fact the case. The fourth and fifth centuries AD actually saw the population of the empire increasing (especially in the east) and the rural economy was flourishing at the same time, particularly in the eastern half of the Roman Empire.²⁹ There is no reason whatsoever to associate more effective control over resources with ‘decline’ and ‘decay’.

The centralization of imperial authority and greater government intrusion actually, far from bringing about military ‘decline’, was instrumental in the revival of Roman military strength. Under Diocletian and his successors in the early fourth century AD the number of legions in the Roman army compared to the third century armies under the Severan emperors increased exponentially from 33 to over 67. In the eastern provinces alone there were 28 legions, 70 cavalry units, 54 auxiliary *alae* and 54 cohorts.³⁰ The number of infantry in the legions was reduced and the cavalry wing of the imperial armies, critical to coping with Rome’s more mobile enemies in the fourth century, was significantly augmented. This allowed the empire to build up highly mobile field armies that were for the first

time commanded by experienced, professional soldiers, a truly significant improvement from the days of the early empire when commanders of regiments and generals of armies had been for the most part actually civilians holding temporary commissions and who were in reality amateurs who rarely had enough military experience.

A significant portion of the empire's best troops was progressively becoming Germanic or Alan in origin.³¹ However, there is nothing in the history of the fourth and fifth centuries AD that could lead us to believe that these naturalized 'barbarians' were anything but very loyal Roman soldiers. If anything, history attests that they were often the most effective and devoted of the imperial troops. Rome in the fourth century AD was still by far the most formidable military power in Western Eurasia. Rome's only real comparable opponent was the Sassanian Persian Empire to the east who by the fourth century had largely been contained. The geopolitical reality until the 370s AD favoured Rome. Before the appearance of the Huns all evidence from the fourth century, both historical and archaeological, points to the likelihood of a lasting continuation of Roman imperial rule even with the occasional barbarian disturbance on the empire's fringes.

THE INVASION OF THE HUNS

The geopolitical situation mentioned above had actually been the recurrent state of affairs in Europe and Western Eurasia as a whole since the first century AD. For nearly 400 years little had changed to this geopolitical landscape other than the occasional forays of one group into the sphere controlled by another. The arrival of the Huns would change all this dramatically.

The Huns as recounted earlier first overwhelmed the powerful Alans. Some of the Alans were absorbed into the growing Hunnic Empire in Europe. Others fled west to avoid living under Hunnic rule. The account given by our principal source for this early phase of Hunnic expansion in Europe, Amminanus Marcellinus, is so hopelessly confused and distorted that the exact sequence of events that followed the Hunnic conquest of the Alans is difficult to reconstruct. Ammianus seems to suggest that the Huns, after conquering the Alans, then immediately fell upon the Greuthungi Goths under King Ermanaric in the Ukraine. He tells us that this led to the death of the aforementioned Gothic king. But then right after this Ammianus notes that the subsequent Gothic king Vithimeris with the assistance of some other Huns (*hunis aliis*) fought off the Alans invading his lands.³²

Does this imply that the Huns were so disorganized at this early stage that some of them even offered their services to the Goths whom they had just defeated? Maenchen-Helfen speculated that these 'other

Huns' of Ammianus were not the Huns who had just before defeated the Greuthungi Goths but the Chunni (mentioned by Ptolemy in the second century AD) who he conjectures may have included some Turkic tribes such as the Alpidzuri, Alcidzuri, etc., who were already living west of the Volga at the time of the Hunnic invasion and had joined the Goths in resisting the new invaders.³³ This is an interesting theory and we can note for instance that some of these presumably 'Turkic' groups Maenchen-Helfen identifies such as the Alpidzuri etc. continued to resist Hunnic domination even after retreating to the Danube well after 376 AD.

However, it could also be that Ammianus has simply muddled up the sequence of events which unfolded. It would make much better sense if we assumed that the people who fell upon the Greuthungi Goths of Ermanaric after the Alan defeat at the hands of the Huns were not the Huns who were further to the east, but elements of the Alans who were fleeing west away from the Hunnic troops pursuing them. It is likely that the Goths under pressure from these Alan refugees appealed for aid from the Huns who arrived in pursuit of their defeated Alan enemies. After the Alans were dealt with to their satisfaction the Huns probably then in Machiavellian fashion fell upon the weakened Greuthungi Goths and conquered them as well. The rapidity of the Hunnic conquest of the well-organized Greuthungi can best be explained if we reinterpret Ammianus' account in this way.

The relentless Hunnic expansion continued. After the Greuthungi had fallen, next it was the turn of the Tervingi Goths. The more disorganized Tervingi were easily defeated by the Huns and with their homeland in Romania occupied by Hunnic invaders, the Tervingi and other Gothic and Alanic groups flooded across the Danube into Roman territory. The Roman mishandling of this refugee crisis led to the revolt of the Tervingi Goths. A showdown followed at the famous battle of Adrianople where the Roman emperor Valens and most of the field army of the Eastern Roman Empire were cut to pieces by the ferocious cavalry charge of the combined Greuthungi-Alan cavalry who had arrived on the battlefield to relieve the hard-pressed Tervingi. The speculation that there were also Huns participating in this battle seems unlikely. What the battle did show was the glaring tactical inferiority of the Roman army vis-à-vis the steppe-type army fielded by the Greuthungi-Alans under their presumably Alan or Greuthungi leaders Alatheus and Saphrax. The age of the invincibility of Roman infantry armies was now clearly a thing of the past and the Romans discovered to their horror that their military system, despite the reforms of Constantine and subsequent emperors, was still out of date in comparison with the novel type of warfare being introduced from the steppe region.

The terror of the Hunnic name preceded them into Roman territory, relayed by the tales told by Gothic and Alanic refugees who flooded Rome's Balkan provinces. We hear references being made to the so-called Thracian Huns who served as mercenaries in the army of the Roman emperor Theodosius the Great under their own chiefs. However, in all likelihood these so-called Huns were probably the non-Hunnic Turkic groups such as the Alpidzuri who once in Roman territory masqueraded as Huns in order to take advantage of the military prestige that emanated from that name. There were also even runaway slaves and deserters from the Roman army who called themselves Huns to exploit the terror inspired by the Huns. This group of vagabonds ravaged Thrace in 401 AD until they were wiped out by the regular Roman army under the general Fravitta.³⁴

That these so-called Huns in Thrace were imposters is made more likely by the fact that the main Hunnic power centre until the beginning of the fifth century AD was still far to the east in the Kuban steppe region. Only an advance guard of the Huns was active on the Danube in the 370s AD.³⁵ According to the late fifth and early sixth century AD Roman historian Zosimus, in the year 381/2 AD the Sciri and Carpodacians under the probable direction of the Huns attacked Roman territories across the Danube.³⁶ The fact that the Huns in possibly their first ever recorded raid into Roman territory had to resort to using recently conquered non-Hunnic subject peoples gives us a clear indication of the dearth of Hunnic troops in this extreme western edge of their empire in the early 380s AD.

In 384 AD, according to the bishop Ambrose, the Huns with some Alans, this time at the request of the Romans, attacked the Suebic Juthungi (a Germanic tribal group) causing trouble in the Roman province of Raetia and then rode on in the direction of Gaul (modern France), where they were induced by the Roman emperor Valentinian to turn back and fall upon the Alamanni.³⁷ This incursion into the west was evidently carried out by a greater force of Huns and subject peoples and Thompson suggests that the Huns may also have conquered eastern Pannonia (roughly western parts of modern Hungary) during this time from the Romans.³⁸ Hun rule was thus slowly being consolidated in the Danubian region and this triggered further Germanic migrations from this area into Roman territory.

A group of Goths under a certain Odotheus tried to break into Roman territory in 386 AD in an attempt to escape from the Huns. The migration of these unfortunate people ended in their destruction and after this there were no serious tribal movements on the Danube until the early years of the fifth century AD, indicating that by 387 AD at the latest the Huns had established firm control over the Hungarian Plains. This was an impressive achievement by any standards. It had

taken the Huns just over ten years to conquer the immense region stretching from western Hungary to the Volga and also to largely secure this turbulent region. Such rapid conquest and also stabilization, though surely not without the occasional mishaps, could not have been managed without an organized system of governance.

Nearly a decade would pass before the next major Hunnic military moves were made in Europe. Doubtlessly the interlude would have been a breathing space to consolidate the already enormous territorial gains made in the late 370s and early 380s. By 395 AD the Huns were ready to expand again and the campaign that they conceived was a gigantic undertaking, which fully demonstrates the immense organizational capacity of the Hunnic state in Europe. The main eastern wing of the Huns in the east launched a major offensive through the Caucasus against both the Sassanian Persian Empire and the Roman Empire. The western wing of the Huns at the same time launched a simultaneous incursion into the Balkans from the west.³⁹ The sheer scale and coordination of this invasion, which terrified Saint Jerome and Ephraim the Syrian,⁴⁰ are an unmistakable indication of Hunnic political unity and military sophistication. The Roman sources record how the east trembled at the sight of the swift horses of the Huns. Ephraim the Syrian is the most dramatic and in a violent diatribe he claims that the Huns ate children, drank the blood of women and were the reincarnation of the devil, Gog and Magog. The Romans belatedly put together a force to resist the Huns, but there is no indication whatsoever that the powerful Hunnic invasion force was directly engaged by the Romans. All that can be surmised is that there were probably some minor skirmishes between the Romans and Hunnic stragglers returning to their territory after plundering the Asiatic provinces of Rome. When the Huns left, despite the absence of any major military engagements or achievements to speak of, and the enormity of Roman losses, the emperor and his court declared a 'phantom' victory over the Huns, a pattern which we shall see was repeated again and again in Rome's encounter with the Huns.

ULDIN

At the beginning of the fifth century AD the first Hunnic king who is named by Roman sources appears, a certain Uldin/Uldis based along the Danube. The -in/-is suffix of his recorded name is a Greek suffix added to his proper name. Therefore his Hunnic name was most likely Uld/Ult, which is possibly the Oghuric Turkic version (compare with *ultta* in the Chuvash language, the only extant modern descendant of Oghuric Turkic) of the common Turkic word for the number six, *Alti*. The earlier Xiongnu of Inner Asia and the Bulgars who succeeded the

Huns in Europe both had an aristocratic council/group of six top-ranking nobles. Uldin was, therefore, possibly not the real name of this Hunnic ruler, but may simply be his title indicating that he was a vassal king, one of the six principal nobles (?) of the empire, who in the Hun system were usually members of the ruling imperial clan. He was probably the sub-king in charge of the western border territories of the Hunnic realm along the Danube and in Pannonia (the main Hunnic realm at this stage being in the Ukraine and southern Russia). In fact the Romans actually called him just that, a *regulus* (a small king or sub-king of the Huns). His army in the area he governed was largely made up of unreliable recently subdued Germanic and other native peoples. Despite the actual weakness of his own position Uldin boasted to the Roman ambassador that all lands under the sun belonged to him and the Huns.

Uldin's control of the western territories of the Hunnic Empire was put to the test when in the early fifth century a certain Radagaisus led an exodus of Goths from Hunnic territory into Roman Italy in 405 AD.⁴¹ One conjecture for the reason behind this sudden secessionist movement after nearly two decades of relative stability in the Hunnic west is that Uldin after a period of consolidation now attempted to impose Hunnic princes and nobles as rulers/governors on subject peoples, in line with standard steppe Inner Asian practice, but on peoples who had until then enjoyed autonomous rule or the self-government of native princes under Hunnic tutelage. Uldin reacted vigorously to this desertion and in collusion with the Western Roman general Stilicho he annihilated the rebel tribes under Radagaisus, thereby demonstrating the general stability of Hunnic rule in the Danubian region and its ability to punish ruthlessly any secessionist tendencies among newly conquered subjects.

The alliance between Uldin and Stilicho would also briefly benefit the Western Romans, since it kept in check the ambitions of Alaric and his Visigoths (then in the western Balkans) who threatened Italy. The Western Roman emperor Honorius employed an army of 10,000 Huns, presumably from Uldin, to attack Alaric. Uldin also for a while solicited good relations with the Eastern Romans as well, delivering to Constantinople the head of the renegade Gothic commander Gainas who had been in Roman service, but had rebelled and ended up in Hunnic hands ca. 400 AD. The reason behind Uldin's apparent willingness to cooperate with the Romans can probably be found in the need to secure his southern flank while he pursued expansion further into western Germanic territory. In 405/6 AD we indeed see a major disturbance in the west where a group of Alans led a migration of Vandals and Suebi across the Rhine into Gaul, defeating the Franks in the process.⁴² This migration was in all likelihood triggered by

Uldin's thrusts into former Vandal and Suebic territories.⁴³

However, when Stilicho along with his Hunnic bodyguards (probably given to him by Uldin) were brutally murdered by Sarus, another mercenary commander in Roman service, the Hunnic alliance with the Western Romans was abruptly ended. We see Uldin or his associates actually supplying Alaric, via Alaric's brother-in-law Athaulf, with Hunnic troops for the Gothic invasion of Italy in 408 AD. This invasion force subsequently sacked Rome itself, a shocking event long remembered by the Romans. In the same year in 408 AD Uldin in person led an ill-fated adventure into Roman territory.⁴⁴ The invasion ended in failure, partially due to treachery among Uldin's own retainers and captains who were incited to rebellion by Roman bribes. The Romans after their less than sporting victory sold the captured Scirians and other Germanic prisoners of war from Uldin's army into slavery, which incidentally confirms the fact that most of the 'Hunnic' army in the west at this stage still consisted of unreliable Germanic, Alanic, etc. levies. Nonetheless the extraordinary counter-measures taken by the Romans after Uldin's invasion to prevent future Hunnic invasions, fortifications and the strengthening of the Roman fleet along the Danube, demonstrated that this Hunnic setback had still given the Romans a scare. Hunnic retribution for this defeat would eventually come with terrible consequences for the Romans.

After this debacle we hear no more about Uldin and in the next decade our sources become even more patchier and fragmentary making it nearly impossible to figure out the contours of Hunnic history for these two decades before the kings Ruga and Octar emerge on the scene. We learn from Olympiodorus, an early fifth century source, that in the second decade of the fifth century (ca. 412 AD) the Huns were ruled by a supreme king called Karaton. Olympiodorus, who is a rarely available eye-witness of events within the Hunnic Empire, travelled on an embassy to the Huns in order to negotiate with a Hunnic sub-king called Donatus. He records that Donatus was in unknown circumstances murdered, presumably by Roman agents. His overlord Karaton the 'ὁ τῶν ῥηγῶν πρῶτος' (the first of the kings),⁴⁵ was enraged by this, but for some unknown reason was somehow appeased with lavish gifts from the Romans. Incidentally this account in Olympiodorus is one of the clearest indications that the Huns in Europe practised the hierarchical division of power between the supreme ruler (as among the earlier Xiongnu and the Central Asian Huns) and subordinate vassal kings.

RUGA AND OCTAR

By the 420s AD the kingship of the Hunnic Empire rested in the hands

of two brothers, Ruga (sometimes also referred to as Rua or by the Gothified name Rugila) the supreme king who ruled in the east and Octar, his brother, who seems to have acted as his deputy in the west. There were two more brothers: Mundzuk who was the father of Bleda and Attila, and a certain Oebersius (who was held in great honour and later sat on the same couch as the Hunnic king Attila in royal banquets). Given the fact that Mundzuk's sons, the two nephews of Ruga and Octar, succeeded their uncles and Mundzuk himself does not feature as a king in his own right in Roman sources, it can be conjectured that Mundzuk was the eldest of the four brothers who had died before the death of the previous supreme king of the Huns (presumably the father or uncle of the four brothers). In the steppes, the eldest living male of the imperial clan usually had the strongest claim to the imperial throne regardless of whether the deceased ruler had a son or not. Thus Bleda and Attila, although they were nephews and not the sons of the two previous rulers, Ruga and Octar, nonetheless succeeded to the imperial throne of the Huns, most probably by the principle of seniority and also the withdrawal of their uncle Oebersius (presumably the youngest of the four brothers) from candidacy.

The Hunnic kings Ruga and Octar seem to have had a close relationship with the Roman strongman Aetius, who had spent his early years as a hostage at the Hunnic court. Aetius was able to enjoy the continued favour and military support of the Huns for his own ambition within the Roman Empire. In 425 AD he supposedly employed an army of 60,000 (!) Huns to support his candidate for Western Roman emperor, the usurper John, against the forces of Emperor Theodosius II. The situation was all resolved before the Huns could be deployed. However, this alliance between Aetius and the Huns would endure into the next decade with Ruga providing military assistance to his ally Aetius, whenever the latter requested it.

During the reign of Ruga and Octar Hunnic expansion continued unabated. In 430 AD Octar was campaigning with a force of 10,000 men in the far west of the Hunnic realm just east of the Rhine when he came across a group of fugitive Burgundians ca. 3,000 in number, according to the church historian Socrates. The account given next by Socrates, which many experts have regarded as simply a fable and downright unhistorical, tells of how Octar, who was extremely gluttonous, 'burst open' during the night and died an ignoble death. This threw the Huns into confusion and the Burgundians are said to have used this chaos within the Hunnic camp to thoroughly rout the Huns. Because Socrates attributes this Burgundian triumph to the intervention of the Christian God who had been gratified by the conversion of the Burgundians in the face of the Hunnic peril, scholars

have tended to reject the historicity of this account.

However, there are grounds for taking this story a bit more seriously. The Burgundians after this event became particularly formidable and a grave threat to the security of Roman Gaul. The sudden augmentation of Burgundian power may to a certain extent be explained by their unexpected victory over the Huns, which resulted in the death of one of the principal kings of the Huns. This would have given the Burgundians immense prestige among the Germanic tribes in the west and may have persuaded many to join the Burgundian confederacy. That the Burgundians had inflicted some form of embarrassment on the Huns can also be guessed from the particularly severe penalties imposed on the defeated Burgundians by the Huns later in 437 AD. Prosper,⁴⁶ a fifth century Roman chronicler, tells us that the Huns in alliance with Aetius destroyed the Burgundians in that year. Reportedly 20,000 Burgundians were massacred by the Huns and King Gundahar of the Burgundians shared the fate of his people. Attila, who was by this stage probably the king of the western half of the Hunnic Empire as the deputy of his eastern overlord, Bleda the supreme king, seems to have played a prominent role in the destruction of the Burgundians. He is the principal character responsible for the extinction of the Burgundians in the later Germanic epic of the Nibelungen, where he is remembered as Etzel.

In contrast to the good relations between the Huns and Aetius, whom Ruga may have regarded essentially as his vassal, Hunnic relations with the Eastern Roman Empire were fraught with difficulties. Thus, in 422 AD the Huns under Ruga forced the eastern Emperor Theodosius II to negotiate peace and promise an annual tribute of 350 pounds of gold. The Eastern Romans had suffered a reverse against the Sassanian Persians that year as well. Interestingly after this debacle the Roman emperor put up an inscription (the Hebdomon inscription) claiming that he was victorious everywhere.⁴⁷ A military defeat was thus portrayed by the Romans as a triumph, a warning sign that we cannot accept as fact every assertion of victory in our Roman sources. In 434 AD Ruga dispatched his envoy, Eslla, to Constantinople demanding the return of fugitive peoples from the Hunnic realm who had been granted asylum within the Eastern Roman Empire, the Amilzuri, Itimari, Tunsures, Boisci and others. What is interesting is that the names of some of these tribes have clear Turkic etymologies, suggesting therefore, as discussed earlier, that there were possibly other Turkic groups in Europe before the Hunnic arrival, who were still at this late stage resisting Hunnic domination.

As mentioned earlier, in the 420s Ruga had already invaded Thrace and had forced the Romans to pay a light annual tribute to the Huns. Now the stakes were raised higher and Ruga led his immense army

into Thrace yet again, leaving the Romans in a state of panic. The situation was aggravated by the fact that a significant portion of the Eastern Roman army was away in the west battling the Vandals in North Africa. The forces that Constantinople was able to muster for the defence of the imperial capital were easily brushed aside by Ruga's army. Then, according to our sources (Socrates, Theodoret and John of Nikiu) God destroyed Ruga and his followers in accordance with the prophecies found in the book of Ezekiel (38:2, 22). Ruga, as the blessed archbishop Proclus the Patriarch (434–47 AD) had preached to his terrified congregation, had been struck dead by God's lightning for his hubris. The truth may have been more prosaic than this fantastic tale, but Ruga had indeed in circumstances that escape us died before he could launch his decisive attack on Constantinople. The city celebrated and the emperor Theodosius II celebrated a triumph over the 'vanquished' Huns, despite the fact that the Roman army had been summarily defeated and no victories had been won by Roman arms. The Huns left without a king departed and returned home. This was interpreted as a 'victory' by the Romans. It would not be the first or the last.

HUNNIC POLITICAL ORGANIZATION IN EUROPE

It is worthwhile at this point to pause for a moment and examine the nature and size of the political entity that Atilla and Bleda inherited from their uncles. The Hunnic Empire in Europe has often been characterized even in some scholarly literature as a haphazardly organized tribal chieftainship rather than a state. However, a close examination of our Roman sources gives us an entirely different picture. We have already observed the Inner Asian hierarchical division of authority between the supreme king and his subordinate kings among the Huns during the reign of Karaton and also earlier during the time of Uldin who was a *regulus* (sub-king/lesser king). Priscus, who took part in a Roman embassy to the court of Attila the Hun and who is therefore another reliable eye-witness of Hunnic political practices and customs, gives us a much clearer picture of Hunnic political organization as it was functioning during the reigns of Attila and Bleda.

To begin with Priscus comments on the military strength of the Hunnic Empire: 'he (Attila) has a military force which no nation can withstand'.⁴⁸ This was of course not the first time the Romans had noticed Hunnic military prowess. Earlier in the fourth century Aurelius Victor already called the Huns and their Alan subjects the worst of all evils and '*extremum periculum*' (extreme danger) to the name of Rome.⁴⁹ Inner Asian historians such as the late Denis Sinor

famously explained that such formidable military power was due to the tactical and strategic superiority of Inner Asian mobile armies and advanced military practices. Inner Asians were no primitive hordes of barbarians. In terms of military sophistication they were superior even to the Romans. However, this military superiority had a prerequisite: political unity among steppe peoples. When united under strong political control an army made up of Inner Asian cavalymen was virtually invincible due to the superior military skills (the world's best horsemanship and archery with the 'wonder' weapon of the steppes, the composite reflex bow, which had over twice the range of the later famous English longbow) of its soldiers and superior battle tactics employed by its generals.

With this formidable military machine the Huns according to Priscus controlled a vast territory which in the east stretched to an area very close to the land of the Medes (i.e. the Persians in Iran).⁵⁰ He records a Hunnic invasion, probably in the 420s⁵¹ into Media (Iran), launched under the command of Basich and Kursich, members of the *royal family* (τῶν βασιλείων Σκυθῶν) and *commanders of a large force* (πολλοῦ πλήθους ἄρχοντας). That the Huns controlled territory at least as far east as the Volga region is confirmed by archaeology through the discovery of Hunnic cauldrons along the Kama river and Attila's gift of furs to visiting ambassadors. This is probably an indication that the Hunnic tributary system reached deep into even the forest region of western Russia beyond the Pontic steppe. The presence of Hunnic princely graves, made identifiable by distinctive Hunnic artefacts such as the golden bow (an insignia of rank among the Huns), dating to the early fifth century AD across a vast area stretching from the Rhine to areas east of the Dnieper provide archaeological evidence for Hunnic imperial rule over most of Central and Eastern Europe.

Attila, according to Priscus' source, a man from the Western Roman Empire called Constantiolus, whom Priscus met during the embassy (another eye-witness source), ruled over the whole of Scythia and even the islands of the ocean (presumably a reference to parts of Scandinavia, which was at the time thought to be an island).⁵² Attila was according to Priscus contemplating the conquest of Persia, during the time of his embassy.⁵³ When the Romans with Priscus prayed that God would incite Attila and his Huns to attack the Persians and not the Romans, Constantiolus warns them that if the Huns succeed in conquering Persia, Attila will no longer tolerate Roman 'independence' and 'holding them to be obviously his servants' would force the Romans to call him an emperor.⁵⁴ In fact Attila was so contemptuous of Roman power that Priscus notes he regarded the Roman emperors as equals to his generals.⁵⁵

The account of Priscus tells us several critical things about Hunnic political organization in the middle of the fifth century AD and earlier. The commissioning of two high-ranking members of the royal family to important military commands is clearly reminiscent of earlier Xiongnu practices, which assigned major military forces to royal relatives. Priscus also mentions that the Hun noble Edeco was one of the intimates of Attila (*epitedeios*),⁵⁶ who guarded the person of the king in shifts. We see here a mirror image of the common Inner Asian practice of royal bodyguards. Similar royal bodyguards performing the same functions as Edeco were to be found also in the contemporary Rouran Khaganate in Mongolia to the east. We furthermore hear of Attila's *logades* (picked men) who feature repeatedly in our sources on the Huns. These *logades* commanded military units (probably organized along tribal lines) in the Hunnic army and their ranks included eminent men such as Edeco the ruler of the Sciri, Berik 'the ruler of many villages in Scythia' due to his noble birth,⁵⁷ and men with more lowly origins like Orestes, the father of the last Western Roman emperor Romulus Augustulus (who was probably of Greco-Roman origin of some sort).

The 'picked men' also clearly performed civil administrative functions as well as a military role, thereby echoing the overlapping of civilian and military roles of Inner Asian government officials/dignitaries which we have observed earlier in the book.⁵⁸ Priscus did not clearly identify distinctions between the various *logades* (identifying which was of course not the purpose of his embassy and he should be given credit for even noticing the intricacies of Hunnic political organization), but he does leave us with tantalizing clues. He tells us that there was a distinct and regulated hierarchy among the *logades* themselves. This is shown by the characteristically Inner Asian seating arrangements during the feasts organized by Attila for the Roman ambassadors. Onegesius and Berik, both *logades*, were seated to the right and left of the Hunnic king, but Onegesius outranking Berik sat to the right of the king which was considered more honourable. This detail, often overlooked, is highly significant since in the old Xiongnu Hun Empire and also all other steppe societies, the right (signifying the east, with orientation towards the north) had precedence over the left (west). By way of example the Muslim geographer Ibn Fadlan (922 AD) tells us that the Khazars and the Volga Bulgars (partially descendants of the Huns) also held the right (east) as the place of honour. Thus the most important princes of the realm were seated to the right of the ruler/Khagan.

Interestingly in the seating arrangement at Attila's court banquet senior members of the Hunnic royal family, who ranked even higher than the *logades*, such as the king's paternal uncle Oebersius and the

eldest son of the king were seated in conspicuous positions of honour as befits their rank right next to the king on the same couch.⁵⁹ That the *logades* were not randomly selected men, but are actually identical with the ranked officials of a traditional steppe empire such as the Xiongnu, is confirmed by the later Byzantine use of the same term to describe graded officials within the Avar Empire that succeeded the Huns.⁶⁰

Because Priscus does not give us clear indications of which tier of governors and officials the various *logades* belonged to, we cannot be entirely sure as to which level of the old Xiongnu hierarchy these Hunnic Lords were equivalent to. What is clear is that they were directly answerable to the central government of the Hunnic Empire and at least some of them were in all likelihood the equivalent of major provincial governors such as the Xiongnu 24 lords of 'ten thousand horsemen', who administered the main provinces (in the steppes and also in the Hunnic realm often groups of tribes situated in a fixed region, rather than a strictly defined territorial block) and regulated the relations between the centre and the peripheral vassal sub-kingdoms. This identification is made highly likely by the fact that Edeco and other *logades* often functioned as royal ambassadors and communiqués to large vassal tribes. Onegesius, who was by far the most important of the *logades*, was sent to the Akatziri tribe in the Ukraine to supervise the instalment of Ellac, the Hunnic crown prince, as direct overlord of the tribe.⁶¹ We see very similar duties performed by major Xiongnu governors and sub-kings.⁶² Revealingly the name or rather the title of one of Attila's kinsmen Emmedzur is according to Altheim the Latinized corruption of a formal Hunnic title *ämäcur* which means 'horse lord'.⁶³ This almost exactly matches the title given to major governors of the Xiongnu Empire, Lord of ten thousand horsemen.

These *logades* of course did not suddenly turn up under Attila. The so-called *oikeioi* (retainers) and *lochagoi* (captains) of Uldin (the western Hunnic king of the early fifth century) who betrayed Uldin during his campaign against the Romans were probably lower ranks of the *logades* decried at the time of Attila. These captains/governors during military campaigns not only commanded specific squadrons of Huns assigned to each of them, but also contingents drawn from subject peoples provided by the districts/provinces that they governed.⁶⁴

Taxes and tribute were also collected from subject peoples either by the *logades* or more probably by lower-ranking officials working under their administration, usually it seems in kind (agricultural produce of various kinds). As in the contemporary Roman Empire, taxes in the Hunnic Empire were apparently collected in rather ruthless fashion.

Chelchal the Hun later during Dengizich's (one of Attila's younger sons) invasion of the Roman Empire in the late 460s describes vividly the Hunnic collection of taxes (tribute) from the Goths. The reminder of the indignities they had been forced to endure by these tax-collectors was enough to drive the Goths in the Hunnic army to rebel against their masters.⁶⁵

As in the case of the Xiongnu and other Inner Asian empires, the Empire of the Huns was not a 'nomadic' empire. It possessed an agricultural base. In Europe this base was made up of mainly the conquered populations in the Ukraine (like the Goths and others) who had practised agriculture from the time of the ancient Scythians. A not inconsiderable number of agricultural workers were also imported into the empire from Roman territory (usually captives).⁶⁶

That a government bureaucracy also existed can be assumed by the records of important roles given to ex-Roman defectors such as Rusticius, Constantius and Orestes (the father of the future Roman emperor Romulus Augustulus) at the court of Attila. The absorption of the Romanized population of conquered Pannonia and other Danubian provinces would no doubt have strengthened the bureaucratic base of the Huns.⁶⁷ As Altheim notes the Huns, contrary to what many expect, were not illiterate brutes either. The Huns may in fact have possessed their own written script.⁶⁸ Priscus reports that Hunnic secretaries read out names of fugitives who had fled to the Romans from Hunnic territory from a written list.⁶⁹ Altheim notes that the writing that was read was definitely neither Greek nor Latin. He suggests that the Oghuric Turkic runic writing system of the later Hunnic Bulgars, which we know from inscriptions in Bulgaria, was brought into Europe earlier from Central Asia by the Huns. Further possible evidence for Hunnic writing can be found in the Syriac chronicle of Zacharias of Mitylene who writes that in 507 or 508 AD bishop Qardust of Arran went to the land of the Caucasian Huns where he remained for seven years. He returned bringing with him books in the Hunnic language.

It has even been speculated that the powerful Onegesius who was held in such high regard as to sit on the right of the Hunnic king in banquets, that is the position of honour, and enjoyed considerable power, almost the equivalent of that of the grand vizier (as shown by the courteous treatment of his wife by Attila himself and Onegesius' possession of the second biggest palace in the capital, which all point to his influence at court), was actually the non-Hunnic head of this state bureaucracy. Although it might be plausible to regard him as the head of the Hunnic imperial bureaucracy, it is illogical to assume that just because he may have headed the bureaucracy, he therefore must have been Greco-Roman and not Hunnic. Onegesius is probably a

deceptively Greek-looking Hunnic name. It is probably Old Turkish *on-iyiz*. Given the practice in Inner Asian empires of allocating high office almost exclusively to royal family members and related aristocrats, he is more likely to have been a Hun rather than a Roman defector. The name of Onegesius' brother Skottas, who if Onegesius is a Hun should likewise be a Hun, is presumed to be Gothic in origin, which tells us that ethnicity and names do not often go hand in hand. What is even more interesting is the conjecture that Onegesius' name actually means 'der zehn zur Gefolgschaft hat',⁷⁰ i.e. it is a reference to his position as a commander in the army organized in the typical steppe decimal system, so again a title rather than a proper name.

All this shows that the hierarchical, stratified structure of government which we have seen earlier among the Xiongnu and Central Asian Huns also existed in the Hunnic Empire of Europe. Even at the lower tribal level this hierarchy and strict stratification are both evident. Priscus tells us a curious story about a Hunnic vassal horde along the shores of the Black Sea, the Akatziri Huns. The disaffected Akatziri Huns were planning a revolt against Attila, who had just overthrown the legitimate supreme king of the Hunnic Empire, his elder brother Bleda, an act which may have caused the alienation of the Akatziri from the Hunnic central government. The Akatziri, who were the dominant Hunnic fief in the east, in all likelihood had been under the jurisdiction of Bleda, not Attila, hence their eagerness to avenge their murdered master.⁷¹

The Akatziri plans for revolt were actively encouraged by the Romans. However, the Roman ambassadors made an error while distributing gifts from the emperor to the leaders of the rebellion. Kouridachus, who was senior in office (πρεσβύτερον ὄντα τῇ ἀρχῇ), was given his gifts second, which was interpreted as denying him proper honours due to his rank (οὐ κατὰ τάξιν).⁷² This slight led him to inform Attila about the planned rebellion and the Hunnic king quickly moved to suppress the revolt, after which he set up his eldest son Ellac as the direct ruler of this important eastern 'fief'.⁷³ The references to ranks, office and precedence clearly suggest that the complex, hierarchical stratified system of Inner Asian governance was practised by the Huns even at this tribal level. The Huns built up a governmental apparatus that was quite unlike anything found among the earlier Germanic confederacies in the west and even the Greuthungi confederacy of the Goths. This was obviously their Inner Asian political legacy that they had inherited from the Xiongnu and other Inner Asian peoples that had preceded them. The introduction of Hunnic political practices resulted in a tighter political command structure, precise ranks among government officials and allocation of clearly defined roles to conquered peoples.⁷⁴

Ellac's appointment to rulership over the Akatziri also shows the steppe practice, noted among the earlier Xiongnu, of giving key fiefs to members of the royal family. Attila's vast empire later splintered precisely because of bitter disputes regarding the distribution of fiefs among his sons and relatives.⁷⁵ We also have the case of Laudaricus (Germanic: Laudareiks)⁷⁶ who according to the *Gallic Chronicle of 511* was a blood relative of Attila (cognatus Attilae).⁷⁷ As Bona points out he was in all likelihood a vassal king of an affiliated Germanic tribe in the same way that Ellac was ruler over the eastern Akatziri and Edeco over the vassal Sciri.⁷⁸

Dualism, representing the two wings (Left and Right or east and west) of the traditional steppe imperial system, which we have already noted as a feature of Xiongnu kingship, was likewise very much a dominant feature of the Hunnic system in Europe. Again and again in Hunnic history we find two pre-eminent rulers. Ruga rules in the company of Octar, his brother, who is active primarily in the western half of the Hunnic state, sometimes as the ally of Aetius.⁷⁹ This suggests strongly that he was the ruler of the western half of the empire, while Ruga, who was quite clearly the more prominent king, in the traditional manner ruled the more dominant eastern half. Jordanes' *Getica* (35.180) clearly states: '*germani* Octar et Roas, *qui ante Attilam regnum tenuisse narrantur*'. In other words both Octar and Ruga held the kingship before Attila. They were followed in the Hunnic kingship by their nephews Bleda, who ruled the east, and Attila, who seems to have succeeded to Octar's realm. That Attila ruled the western half seems to be corroborated by the note in Priscus that Attila was of the Gepid Huns (i.e. his personal fief was the Gepids situated in modern Hungary, the core of the western half of the Hunnic Empire).⁸⁰

Attila's temporary sole kingship thus amounted to a 'dictatorship' which ran contrary to standard steppe practice. He of course soon apportioned control of the east to his son Ellac in the familiar dual system. Attila is called by Priscus the *praecipuus Hunnorum rex*,⁸¹ the chief/high king of the Huns.⁸² Ellac was his deputy and his eastern co-ruler (dualism) and there were other sub-kings ruling over lesser subdivisions of the empire. After a period of civil war and chaos following Attila's death dualism again reasserted itself in the succession of Dengizich and Ernakh (west and east respectively) to the vacant Hunnic throne. The successors to the Hunnic Empire in the east, the Bulgar Huns also featured two wings, the Kutrigurs (west) and the Utigurs (east), ruled presumably by Ernakh's descendants.

Below the two kings of the dual system there was also another institution that was probably derived from the eastern steppes, maybe directly from the Xiongnu, an aristocratic council of six top-ranking

nobles. When rendered in Turkic this institution would have been called Altı/Altta (six) cur (nobles). In the Greek transliteration this was rendered Oultizouroi.⁸³ The name (or rather the title) of the Hunnic prince Ultzincur (ult=six, cur=lord), the cousin of Ernakh son of Attila, is further evidence in support of the existence of this body of six among the Huns. The College of six boliades (boyars/nobles) would also become the core political body of the Danubian Bulgarian Empire formed by Hunnic descendants⁸⁴ and in Volga Bulgaria founded by a branch of the Bulgars Huns, as in the old Xiongnu Empire, there would be four pre-eminent sub-kings (the equivalent of the old Xiongnu four horn kings, representing the four main divisions of the Empire), who sat to the right of the supreme ruler.⁸⁵

Given the fact that the Huns possessed the six horn nobles, it is likely that they too like the earlier Xiongnu and the later Volga Bulgars also possessed four principal sub-kings presiding over four principal sub-divisions of the empire. This may be confirmed by Priscus' words summarizing Attila's career, that Attila had ruled both Scythia and Germania and terrorized both Roman Empires. Altheim argues that this reference reflects the Hunnic/steppe ideology of the emperor/Khagan by heavenly mandate ruling over the four quarters of the world.⁸⁶ Certainly this type of ideology appears in the later Turkic Orkhon inscriptions and there is no reason why it could not have existed among the Huns. However, the division between Scythia and Germania is a Roman geographical concept, not a Hunnic one. Thus the likelihood of these words reflecting any Hunnic steppe ideology is rather low. However, there is the possibility that Priscus is Romanizing a Hunnic chant for their dead ruler and has interpreted for his Roman readers Hunnic geographical concepts in a Roman way. That Attila is praised for his good fortune in Priscus, fr. 24 by the mourning Huns is also of interest. The Turkic Khagan in the Orkhon inscriptions holds the title *ïduq qut*, literally holy luck/fortune. Divinely given good luck was one of the core attributes of an Inner Asian ruler, and Attila the Hun in Hunnic eyes was no exception to this.

Indications that the Huns were conscious of their Inner Asian origins and connections with the Xiongnu in particular may also be gleaned from the famous Bulgar prince list. Ernakh, Attila's son, is named as one of the earliest ancestors of Bulgar princes and fascinatingly the imperial clan is called Dulo. This name Dulo is accepted by most experts as being the same as the name Duolu, which was later in the sixth to seventh centuries AD the designation of one of the two major sub-divisions of the Western Turkish Khaganate. What is striking is the fact that the territory occupied by this sub-division of

Western Turks corresponded to the original territory of the Xiongnu Huns in Central Asia before the Huns migrated into Europe. Another tribal designation mentioned in the Bulgar prince list, Ermi, may also refer to a location in Central Asia, the region of the Ermichions (in Western Turkestan).

It is then clear that the Huns had pretty much the same organization as their forebears the Xiongnu and also their eastern, contemporary cousins the Kidarite-Hephthalite White Huns. It was this complex, quasi-feudal socio-political system and superb organizational ability which enabled the Huns to bind innumerable subject peoples, Germanic, Iranian, Slav, Finno-Ugric, Turkic etc. to their vast empire and allowed them to wage continuous, successful wars of conquest in Europe. It is therefore absolutely no accident that the Huns created the first unified empire in Europe beyond Roman borders and presented a real, viable political alternative to Roman hegemony for the peoples of Europe.

The final indication that the Huns in Europe constituted an imperial state rather than a haphazard tribal agglomeration can be found in the Hunnic policy of mass resettlement of conquered peoples. During the reigns of Ruga and Attila (and with little doubt to a limited degree even earlier under kings like Uldin) the Huns imposed mass conscription on conquered non-Hunnic tribal groups like the Alans, Goths and Sciri and forcibly relocated whole tribal communities away from their original homelands to the Danubian region. The Ostrogoths for instance were moved en masse by the Huns from the Ukraine to Pannonia to form what Heather has called a part of the protective ring around the central Hunnic core lands on the middle Theiss.⁸⁷ This mass deportation was probably ordered by either Ruga or his nephews Bleda and Attila. Such controlled mass movements of populations can only be undertaken by a well-organized state with a functioning apparatus of government. The ability to systematically mobilize manpower and tax conquered populations is a key indicator of administrative efficiency and statehood. The Huns possessed both capacities and therefore their empire in Europe clearly constituted a state.⁸⁸

NOTES

¹ Heather (2006), 86–98.

² Todd (1992), 30–1.

³ *Hist. eccl.* 4.33.

⁴ Geary (1999), 119.

⁵ Burns (1980), 47.

⁶ See Vernadsky (1951), 356.

⁷ Procopius 3, 2, 2–3; 3, 3, 1; 5, 1, 3.

- 8 Vernadsky (1951), 359.
- 9 *Getica* 13.78, 14.79.
- 10 *Getica* 50.266.
- 11 Vernadsky (1951), 359.
- 12 Christian (1998), 226.
- 13 Hummer (1998a), 9.
- 14 Ammianus Marcellinus 16.12.23–26. See Wickham (2009), 45 and Hummer (1998a), 8. See also Matthews (1989), 314–5 and Heather (2001), 42.
- 15 Ammianus Marcellinus 16.12.34.
- 16 Ammianus Marcellinus 16.12.17.
- 17 Hummer (1998a), 10; Leube (1978), 514; Lenski (2002), 120.
- 18 Christian (1998), 225; Matthews (1989), 325.
- 19 See James (1988), 52–4.
- 20 Geary (1999), 110.
- 21 Matthews (1989), 294; Todd (1992), 42.
- 22 Kelly (2009), 96.
- 23 Williams (1985), 212.
- 24 Heather (2006), 62, 98; Halsall (2007), 144–7.
- 25 Heather (2006), 63–4; See also Wickham (2009), 9.
- 26 Halsall (2007), 74–7.
- 27 Matthews (1989), 253.
- 28 Kelly (2004), 1, 7, 192–3.
- 29 Cameron (1993), 84, 94, 99, 103.
- 30 Campbell (1999), 234.
- 31 Boak (1955), 92; Williams (1985), 213; Cameron (1993), 51; Halsall (2007), 108–9.
- 32 Ammianus Marcellinus 31.3.3.
- 33 Maenchen-Helfen (1973), 23, 444–55. See also Altheim (1959), vol. 1, 8.
- 34 Liebeschuetz (1990), 61; Demougeot (1979), 390.
- 35 Maenchen-Helfen (1973), 31.
- 36 Zosimus 4. 34. 6.
- 37 Ambrose *Ep.* 24.8 (ed. PL 16, c. 1038). Alemany (2000), 31.
- 38 Thompson (1996), 30.
- 39 Maenchen-Helfen (1973), 52 ff.
- 40 Jerome, *Commentary on Ezekiel* 38.2, J-P Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 25, 356A; *Epistolae* 77.8.
- 41 Zosimus 5.26.4 (ed. Paschoud *CUF* 3, p. 39), Alemany (2000), 109–10.
- 42 Orosius *Hist.* 7.38.3; 7.40.3 (ed. Arnaud-Lindet *CUF* 3, p.112, 118), Alemany (2000), 62–3.
- 43 More on this later.
- 44 Sozomon, *Ecclesiastical History* 9.5. See also Thompson (1996), 33–4.
- 45 Olympiodorus, fr. 19 (*Bibl. Cod.* 80, 173), Blockley (1983), 182.
- 46 *Epit. Chron.* 1322, ed. Mommsen *MGH AA* 9, 475; see also *Chron. Gall.* A 452, 118, ed. Mommsen, 660.
- 47 Croke (1977), 365–6.
- 48 Priscus, fr. 11.2, Blockley (1983), 279.
- 49 *Epit.* 47, 3 (ed. Pichlmayr *BT*, 173).
- 50 Priscus, fr. 11.2, Blockley (1983), 279.
- 51 Blockley (1983), 386.
- 52 Priscus, fr. 11.2, Blockley (1983), 277.
- 53 *Ibid.*
- 54 Priscus, fr. 11.2, Blockley (1983), 279.
- 55 *Ibid.*

- 56 Priscus, fr. 11.1, Blockley (1983), 245.
- 57 Priscus, fr. 13, Blockley (1983), 284.
- 58 See also Thompson (1996), 181. See also Demougeot (1979), 533, 541–2.
- 59 Priscus, fr. 13; 14, Blockley (1983), 284, 290.
- 60 Pohl (1988), 186.
- 61 Priscus, fr. 11, Blockley (1983), 258.
- 62 Pritsak (1954b), 194.
- 63 Altheim (1959), vol. 1, 27.
- 64 Thompson (1996), 182. See also Altheim (1959), vol. 4, 281–3.
- 65 Priscus, fr. 49, Blockley (1983), 356.
- 66 Thompson (1996), 197.
- 67 Whitby (2000c), 711.
- 68 Altheim (1948), 21–2.
- 69 Priscus, fr. 11.2, Blockley (1983), 257.
- 70 Altheim and Stiehl (1954), 259.
- 71 Marcellinus Comes 444–5.1, Croke (1995), 18, 87.
- 72 Priscus, fr. 11.2, Blockley (1983), 258.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 Burns (1984), 46–7, 189.
- 75 Priscus, fr. 25 (Jordanes *Get.* 50, 259–63), Blockley (1983), 319–21.
- 76 Probably a title and not a personal name. A Germanicized Hunnic name says Bona (1991), 63.
- 77 Burgess (2001b), 97.
- 78 Bona (1991), 63.
- 79 See Croke (1977), 353 and Bona (1991), 50.
- 80 Priscus, fr. 21.1 (*Chro. Pasch.* 587f), Blockley (1983), 308. See also Malalas 19, 5–12, Lakatos, *Quellenbuch* 55, Pohl (1980), 247.
- 81 Altheim (1948), 28 sees the title *praecipuus rex* as a translation of an Oghuric Turkic title for emperor *aniliki* found in the Schumen inscription of the Danubian Bulgars.
- 82 Priscus, fr. 24, Blockley (1983), 318.
- 83 Referred to as tribe in Agathias 5.11.2, Frendo (1975), 146. It is probably a reference not to a specific tribe, but to tribes led by the six lords. See Altheim (1959), vol. 1, 27.
- 84 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Cerimoniis Aulae Byzantinae*, 2.47. See also Haussig (2000), 277.
- 85 Pritsak (1954a), 379.
- 86 Altheim (1948), 27–8.
- 87 Heather (1996), 117.
- 88 Findley (2005), 81–3.

5 ATILA THE HUN

BLEDA AND ATILA

The death of Ruga in 434 AD led to the succession of his nephews Bleda and Attila to the Hunnic throne. It is possible that Attila or some other senior royal had already been functioning as Octar's replacement in the west before this time. Before his death in 434 AD ca. 433 AD Ruga seems to have made a commitment to support Aetius in Gaul. The Huns under his nephews honoured this agreement and would continue to supply Aetius with troops until at least 439 AD, probably also thereafter as well until the mid 440s AD, as we shall see later. The Hunnic troops supplied to Aetius would enable him to reassert Roman authority in Gaul. The Huns were instrumental in the capture of Tibatto, the troublesome leader of the Bagaudae (Roman rebels) in 437 AD. That same year, as related earlier, the Huns destroyed the menacing Burgundians in alliance with Aetius. In a separate deployment a small contingent of Huns had also been dispatched to aid the Roman general Litorius in relieving Narbonne (a city in southern France) from the Visigoths. Aetius would inflict a critical defeat on the Visigoths in 438 AD, again with Hunnic support. A later foray against the Visigoths in 439 AD, however, failed and led to the death of Litorius who, according to Salvian, put his trust in the Huns, while the Goths put theirs in God! Nonetheless, despite this reverse the aid of the Huns had been decisive and the Visigothic threat was effectively contained.

Aetius' alliance with the Huns had paid off handsomely. Gaul was largely back under firm Roman control after the chaos of the early fifth century. The Visigoths, Alans, Burgundians and Franks as well as the troublesome Bagaudae in northern Gaul had all by and large been brought to heel by the power of the Huns. The military situation for both halves of the Roman Empire was more promising in the opening years of the 440s, than it had been in nearly half a century. In 441 AD both the Western Roman Empire and the Eastern Roman Empire were readying themselves for the major push to annihilate the Vandals-Alans (they had earlier penetrated Roman territory and settled in North Africa) who were the most problematic group of barbarians to have entered the empire.

But then in 441 AD the peace between the Eastern Roman Empire and the Hunnic Empire, which had held since the death of Ruga in 434 AD, was broken. The two Hunnic kings invaded Rome's Balkan territories and the Sassanian Persians simultaneously attacked the Romans from the east, whether by design or coincidence is hard to fathom. This attack would be the last Persian offensive into Roman territory for the rest of the fifth century, since the Persians had their own White Hunnic threat to deal with in the east. They were in no position to threaten the Romans any longer. In order to meet the Hunnic army invading the empire from the north the Romans recalled the army under the general Areobindus, sent to attack King Geiseric and his Vandals, to defend Constantinople.¹ By the end of 442 AD the war drew to a close and the Romans ended hostilities by agreeing to pay an increased tribute to the Huns.²

ATTILA AS THE SUPREME RULER

Up to this time the principal king of the Huns was without doubt Bleda, who ruled the eastern half of the Hunnic Empire. Then some time between 442 AD and 447 AD (probably ca. 444–5 AD) Attila assassinated his brother and usurped the position of supreme ruler. The Hun state just like the old Empire of Xiongnu was very much characterized by federalism and collective rule among members of the royal clan. Although steppe empires did have a supreme ruler who was an autocrat in theory, tyranny or monopolization of power by an over-zealous ruler could and did at times lead to deadly rebellions and overthrow of the ruling monarch. An example in the Xiongnu context is the overthrow of the Shanyu Wu-yen-chü-t'i, who tried to centralize all political power to himself in violation of the traditional rights of the Xiongnu nobility (*Han Shu* 94A: 35b–38b). Attila's violent usurpation and his autocracy like that of Wu-yen-chü-t'i, who was also a usurper, are likely to have been the root cause of the disorder that followed his death later. Opposition to his authoritarianism was already manifest during his reign, as shown by the desertion of royal princes of the blood such as Mama and Atakam to the Romans. These unfortunate Hun royals were soon handed over to Attila by the defeated emperor in Constantinople or killed by the Romans when they refused to be handed over to Attila.³

After assuming the position of supreme ruler, Attila renewed the war against the Romans in 447 AD. This time the fight was a relatively fair one with neither empire burdened by either subterfuge or a second front. Our sources indicate that this war was much greater than the earlier war of 441–2 AD.⁴ Within the year all Roman forces in the Balkans were simply annihilated. The East Roman field army in

full force fought against the Huns and was systematically wiped out. Attila after having destroyed the Roman army under the Gothic commander Arnegisclus near the river Utus and sacked their base of operation, Marcianople, then trapped and destroyed the last field army immediately available to the Eastern Roman Empire (presumably under the command of generals Aspar and Areobindus, Arnegisclus having died in battle at Utus) at Chersonesus (Gallipoli). Theophanes reports that all three generals were badly defeated and Attila advanced to 'both seas', the Black Sea and the Hellespont, forcing the Eastern Roman emperor Theodosius II to sue for terms.⁵

The *Gallic Chronicle of 452* records that the Huns captured some 70 cities in the Balkans.⁶ Every city in Thrace was taken and sacked with the exception of Adrianople and Heracleia,⁷ while Constantinople itself was gravely threatened. This calamity was then followed by Hunnic raids deep into Greece as far as Thermopylae. The losses sustained by the Eastern Roman Empire was so serious that the devastated Balkans would remain virtually defenceless to roaming bands of barbarians right up to the end of the fifth century.⁸ Marcellinus Comes, a sixth century AD chronicler, summed up the whole disaster in the following way:

Ingens bellum et priore maius per Attilam regem nostris inflictum paene totam Europam excisis inuisisque civitatibus atque castellis conrasit/A mighty war, greater than the previous one, was brought upon us by king Attila. It devastated almost the whole of Europe and cities and forts were invaded and pillaged.⁹

Priscus adds further details about the outcome of the conflict:

The Romans pretended that they had made the agreements (i.e to increase payments of tribute) voluntarily, but because of the overwhelming fear which gripped their commanders they were compelled to accept gladly every injunction, however harsh, in their eagerness for peace.¹⁰

The Romans agreed to pay a lump sum of 8,100 pounds of gold immediately to the Hunnic king personally and also pay unspecified amounts to ransom the immense number of prisoners of war taken by the Huns (even payment of ransoms for Roman prisoners who had fled Hunnic territory and were no longer under Hunnic jurisdiction was also one of the provisions of the peace treaty).¹¹ Priscus with perhaps a touch of hyperbole reports that the Romans were reduced to such dire straits that senators were compelled to sell their wives' jewellery, rich men their furniture and some were even driven to suicide because they could not meet the required contributions demanded from them by the emperor for the payment of tribute to the Huns. The additional expenses needed to rebuild the army from scratch, repair the destroyed fortifications and defences in the Balkans, and the loss of

revenue from the devastated provinces indeed may have stretched imperial finances temporarily to a breaking point.¹²

Even more critical was another condition of the peace treaty after the war of 447 AD.¹³ The Romans were forced to accept the Hunnic occupation of a wide belt of territory south of the Danube stretching from Singidunum on the frontier of Pannonia to Novae, some 300 miles distance and five days' journey in depth, i.e. 100–120 miles. All of Dacia Ripensis and parts of three other Balkan provinces were thus in Hunnic hands. It has been argued that these annexed territories south of the Danube were given back to the Romans by Attila after the embassy of Anatolius and Nomus in 449 AD. Attila indeed did agree to withdraw from Roman territory. However, subsequent events show that Attila did not in fact abandon the Roman territory that he had occupied. Especially since Theodosius with whom he had negotiated died the following year and was succeeded by Marcian who immediately abrogated the terms of the treaty agreed between Attila and Theodosius. This incurred the wrath of Attila. However, fortunately for the Eastern Roman Empire, Attila's gaze was now already turned in a different direction, towards his old ally Aetius in the west.

ATTILA INVADES THE WEST

Until the mid 440s AD Aetius and the Huns had been the best of allies. Therefore, the sudden souring of relations between Attila and Aetius and the former's decision to invade Gaul to destroy his erstwhile ally requires some explanation. The purpose of the Hunnic campaign against the Western Roman Empire in 451 AD has long been misinterpreted due to a hopelessly distorted narrative of the war left to us by one of our principal sources, the Goth Jordanes. Jordanes, whose main interest was the glorification of the role of his Goths in the conflict, attributes the entire Hunnic campaign to the machinations of Geiseric, the king of the Vandals and Alans in North Africa. According to Jordanes' version of events Geiseric was fearful of the wrath of Theodorid, the Visigothic king, because of the barbarous cruelty inflicted on Theodorid's daughter (Geiseric's daughter-in-law) by Geiseric himself and his son Huneric. He, therefore, in order to escape a Visigothic punitive invasion had supposedly bribed Attila to attack Toulouse (the Visigothic capital).

The entire story is of course quite implausible since the Visigoths in 451 AD hardly had the power to threaten the Vandals in any way. The Vandal kingdom was situated across the Mediterranean Sea and the Goths had no navy! Was Geiseric then fearful that maybe the Visigoths would join forces with the Western Romans and utilize the Roman

fleet against him? Perhaps, but then why would the Huns agree to attack Toulouse just to please Geiseric? In fact Jordanes himself makes this tale of bribery on the part of Geiseric superfluous by mentioning that Attila had already thought long about such a campaign (*Getica* 36 185). Jordanes was simply exaggerating the contemporary significance of the Visigoths by making them the ultimate target of Attila's invasion.

A fragment of Priscus, the authenticity of which is highly doubtful,¹⁴ also asserts that Attila decided to attack the Western Roman Empire to gain Honoria and her wealth and to attack the Goths to do a favour to Geiseric. According to what sounds like spurious court gossip in Constantinople, Honoria, the scandal-ridden sister of the then reigning Western Roman emperor, the indolent and incompetent Valentinian III, had secretly proposed marriage (or what was interpreted as such) to Attila the Hun, allegedly in order to escape an unwanted marriage being enforced on her by her brother. Attila was said to have demanded from Valentinian half of the Western Roman Empire as Honoria's dowry, a demand which Valentinian obviously could not accept. According to this story, Attila then led his army into Roman territory to rescue his 'damsel in distress' from her brother and to claim her enormous dowry. Did Attila really invade Gaul to claim his wanton bride (Honoria was presumably in Italy, so he perhaps took a detour?) and at the same time also to help Geiseric get away with abusing another poor damsel in distress? This is certainly fit for a soap opera or a medieval romance, but surely the notion of the Hunnic king rushing to rescue one damsel in distress at the expense of perpetuating the distress of another damsel is slightly contradictory?

Leaving these ridiculous stories aside, the real purpose of the campaign into Gaul and the intended target becomes more obvious in another more genuine fragment of Priscus. The fragment tells us that the initial clashes occurred around the issue of the Frankish succession. By the mid 440s AD Aetius' control over Gaul had been secured with Hunnic support. However, he then began to meddle in Frankish internal affairs along the Rhine region. It is evident that both Aetius and Attila regarded the Franks as belonging to their sphere of influence and sure enough Priscus tells us that Aetius and Attila, both looking to control the Franks, had supported different candidates to the Frankish (most likely Salian Frankish rather than other Frankish)¹⁵ throne. This was what sparked the conflict between them and ended decades of close collaboration between Aetius and the Huns.

That the Huns were angered by Aetius' activity among the Franks is shown by the fact that the rebellious leader of the Bagaudae of

Armorica, a certain Eudoxius, once he had been defeated by the Alans of King Goar sent against him by Aetius, chose to flee to the court of Attila ca. 448 AD, where he was welcomed with open arms. Clearly the relations between the Hun king and Aetius were deteriorating fast and the fact that Aetius had to resort to Alan troops and not the Huns to suppress the Bagaudae (he had used the Huns to suppress a similar revolt earlier in 437 AD) indicates that the Hun troops that had earlier been the backbone of his military in Gaul were no longer available for his use due to the increasing hostility between him and Attila. One can also hazard a conjecture that the alliance with Aetius was more favoured by Bleda and Aetius was not supportive of Attila's overthrow of Bleda in either 444 AD or 445 AD, hence the cooling of relations between the Huns and the Western Romans. After 445 AD we see Aetius conducting military campaigns with the assistance of Alans and Goths rather than the Huns. The Goths, however, were fickle allies and in 446 AD their treason cost the Romans their campaign against the Germanic Suebi in Spain. On the eve of the Hunnic invasion of Gaul the Goths and the Romans were again at loggerheads, and contrary to what Jordanes says there was no real reason as to why Attila, whose principal enemy was Aetius, would have chosen to target the Visigoths who were also at odds with Aetius.

However, as Priscus makes abundantly clear, although Attila's main aim was the securing of Hunnic influence among the Franks along the Rhine, this was interpreted by the contemporary Romans as merely a prelude to the takeover of nothing less than half of the Western Roman Empire.¹⁶ Such fears were compounded by the belligerent rhetoric coming from Attila himself. John Malalas and the Paschal Chronicle tell us that a Hunnic envoy told the Western Roman emperor Valentinian III that Attila the Hun king was the lord and master of both himself and the Roman emperors (!).¹⁷ Fear of complete Hunnic conquest of all of Gaul, probably propagated by Aetius himself in order to win allies, was what persuaded the Visigoths to join the Romans rather than side with the Huns. They may have felt that they too would soon be next on the Hun hit list.

Although by this stage the conquest of the Western Roman Empire was militarily feasible for the Hunnic ruler, a careful examination of Hunnic policy towards Rome shows a distinct unwillingness on the part of the Huns to permanently occupy Roman territory. For instance Attila abandoned most of his Balkan conquests after his overwhelming victory over the Eastern Roman Empire in 447 AD and satisfied himself with setting up a defensive ring around his core territory by creating a series of Hunnic fiefs south of the Danube, which he then officially claimed as Hunnic territory. Even this narrow strip of Roman territory that he had annexed he quickly showed a willingness to give back to

the Romans. Thus, it is highly unlikely that the aim of the Hunnic invasion was the conquest of all of the Western Roman Empire or even all of Gaul.

The core aims of Hunnic foreign policy all throughout seem to have been to prevent conquered subjects within the Hunnic Empire from defecting to the Romans, to create a defensive ring of 'barbarian' vassals around Hunnic core territories and to subject the Roman Empire to vassalage and the payment of tribute (somewhat reminiscent of the policy adopted by the Xiongnu ancestors of the European Huns towards another great empire, that of the Han Chinese much earlier in East Asia, which we have discussed earlier). The limited aims of the Gallic campaign in line with this policy seem to have been to consolidate Hunnic control over all barbarians within what Attila regarded as the Hunnic sphere of influence, i.e. the tribes of the Rhine region (mainly the Franks) and to subject the Western Roman Empire to tribute. That the first of the main objectives was the Franks is confirmed by the route taken by the Hunnic army in their invasion of Gaul. Tournai, Cologne and Trier, all areas with heavy presence of Franks, were attacked first and captured by the Hun king.

The strategy of the campaign, as in the case of the war with the Eastern Roman Empire, called for a clear military victory over the main army of the Western Roman Empire (in this case the army of Aetius in Gaul, hence the prior invasion of Gaul over the more tempting target of Italy where the Western Roman government was situated) in order to force other barbarians leaning towards the Romans into obedience and to stop the Romans from accepting defectors and fugitives from the Hunnic Empire. This would then be followed by a coordinated invasion of Italy itself to force the Western Roman emperor into vassalage and the payment of tribute. Accordingly Attila's army erupted into Gaul in 451 AD, conquered the disputed territory of the Franks from the Romans and then proceeded further west to engage Aetius in a decisive battle.

However, Aetius despite securing the alliance of the Visigoths still avoided battle and retreated deeper into Gaul, sensing no doubt his military inferiority vis-à-vis the Huns. An unexpected event occurred however at Orléans where the Alans, who had by now become the mainstay of Roman power in Gaul, put up a ferocious resistance to the Hunnic siege of that city. That the Alans were targeted for a punitive strike by Attila is interesting in that it supports the analysis that the Visigoths were far from the main target of Attila's invasion. The main target was of course Aetius and the Alans were the core of Aetius' military power in Gaul. The siege dragged on indefinitely and Attila for reasons that are unclear raised the siege and started to return to his home base in Hungary. In all likelihood the campaigning season

was drawing to a close and Attila decided to leave in accordance with standard Hunnic practice. The spectre of the Huns withdrawing was however enough to incite Aetius and the Visigoths into action. Uniting with the gallant Alans who had defended Orléans they chased the Huns and caught up with them at Chalons.

The battle of Chalons that followed has often been called one of the most decisive battles in history. Yet from the perspective of the entire war between the Huns and the Western Romans, the battle was hardly the climax or even the most important engagement of the war. However, despite this historical reality, it is popularly thought that the battle was one of those 'defining moments' of history that saved Western Christendom/Civilization from 'Asiatic' 'barbarism'. The depiction of the battle in this manner commenced in the nineteenth century and continued right up to the middle of the twentieth century. More recently the battle has been analyzed as a Hunnic defeat that broke the myth of Hunnic invincibility¹⁸ or as *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Warfare*, with the subtitle *The Triumph of the West*, asserts, a decisive triumph of Roman defensive strategy.¹⁹ The rationale underlying this emphasis on the Roman or Gothic 'victory' over the Huns is the erroneous belief which simply assumes that a Hunnic victory and conquest of Europe would have been an unmitigated catastrophe for civilization. If this was the case, what are we then to make of the fact that virtually the whole of Europe with the exception of its maritime fringes had been under Hunnic rule for three-quarters of a century by this stage? As we will see in the final chapter, the experience of Hunnic conquest was certainly not a pleasant one (but then was any conquest by any power in history pleasant for the conquered?), yet the effects of Hunnic rule on Germanic Europe was far from purely negative.

Returning to the battle, the two armies that faced each other at Chalons were remarkably similar to each other. Both had a core of Inner Asian cavalry: the Alans of Goar on the Roman side and the Huns-Alans on the Hunnic side. It is likely that there was even a very small contingent of Huns in Aetius' army as well, leftovers from the decades of Hunnic collaboration with the Romans, Huns who naturally would have been regarded as deserters or rebels by the Hun king. The Greuthungi Goths (later to become the core group of the Ostrogoths) and other eastern Germanic peoples like the Gepids fought for Attila, their cousins the Visigoths for Aetius and the Romans. The western Germanic tribes such as the Franks and the Burgundians featured in both armies. Finally there was the Gallo-Roman contingent of Aetius' army and very likely also some of their fellow Gallo-Romans (the Bagaudae) on the other side supporting Attila. In other words whichever side prevailed in this battle would

not have made a big difference to the nature of Europe that followed. The essential components of a post-Roman Europe were all there on both sides of the battlefield.

One noticeable difference would have been the appearance of the opposing commanding generals. If Jordanes is to be believed, Attila, as befits his origins, had a Mongoloid appearance of sorts.²⁰ However, the vast majority of his entourage and troops were overwhelmingly European. The battle of Chalons was certainly no race war and it definitely wasn't a religious one either. Both armies contained both Christians and pagans. The Huns themselves like all Inner Asian peoples were pluralistic when it came to religion and were in fact more tolerant than contemporary Romans towards religious diversity within their empire.

If the battle of Chalons had no racial, religious or even cultural significance, then what is its significance? The most pertinent consequence of the battle was the virtual annihilation of what was left of the Western Roman military establishment. Regardless of how one sees the results of the battle, it is difficult to ignore the fact that after this battle the Western Roman army is not an imperial army of Roman troops (some of course already of foreign origin, but nonetheless fully integrated into the Roman military system). Henceforth it devolved into hired mercenary forces commanded by clearly un-Romanized, unintegrated barbarian kings/chiefs and their retainers who were in no way completely dependent on or even remotely loyal to the imperial government and the Roman state.

The actual outcome of the battle itself is murky due to the unreliability of most of our surviving Greco-Roman sources. Jordanes, who is the principal source of the specific details concerning the course of the battle, is a late source, written around 100 years after the event. To make things worse Jordanes heavily distorted and altered the more reliable original account of the battle in Priscus, which is now unfortunately mostly lost with the exception of a badly preserved fragment. For instance the fragment of Priscus 21.1²¹ tells us that Theodoric, the Visigothic king, was killed by an arrow, not from a fall from his horse as Jordanes would have it. As Barnish²² accurately observes, Jordanes carried out 'a major pro-Gothic reshaping' of the original account of the invasion written by Priscus. Barnish may also be correct in suggesting that the narrative of the battle found in the *Getica* has also been coloured by Cassiodorus' literary account, which also had a vested interest in glorifying the deeds of the Goths (Cassiodorus was an official in the service of Theodoric, the Ostrogothic king of Italy, in the sixth century AD). Jordanes is furthermore known for using the enemies of the Goths such as the Huns and Vandals as a literary device for highlighting the

valour and greatness of his Goths. The reliability of his narrative therefore is highly questionable whenever battles involving Goths are related. By way of example Jordanes even went so far as to invent a phantom Vandal kingdom north of the Danube in the early fourth century AD in order to attribute a great victory over the Vandals to an equally fictitious ancient Gothic king called Geberich (*Getica* 22.113–5).²³ Jordanes in *Getica* 31.161 and *Romana* 322 also invents the bizarre scenario of the Alans and Vandals fleeing Pannonia and invading Gaul (in 406 AD) because they feared the military might of the Visigoths and also feared their return.

Opinion on who actually won the battle is divided among scholars with most advocating a Roman-Visigothic victory, Goffart (1988) and Vernadsky (1951) suggesting that the battle of Chalons was militarily indecisive, and a minority favouring a Hunnic victory. What is noteworthy in Jordanes' highly unreliable account is that the credit for the 'victory' over the Huns is given almost solely to the Visigoths while the Western Romans under Aetius, who were the main target of the Hun expedition, and the Alans who actually fought the most formidable Hunnic contingent within Attila's army in the centre of the battlefield, receive scarcely any attention at all in the battle narrative. The only undisputed facts that can be gleaned from Jordanes' account is that Theodorid the king of the Visigoths was slain at the beginning of the battle²⁴ and that the Visigoths retreated after the battle to their homebase in Toulouse, leaving the battlefield in the possession of the Huns.

Quite obviously these facts do not appear to fit the narrative of a glorious Visigothic victory. In antiquity the death of the commanding general usually meant defeat for the army concerned and victory was always claimed by the side in possession of the battlefield after the battle, in this case the Huns. Jordanes in order to skirt around these awkward details attributes the hasty withdrawal of the Visigoths after the battle to Thorismud's (the new Visigothic king after the death of Theoderid) anxiety over his inheritance in Toulouse and the machinations of the crafty Aetius who persuaded Thorismud to let the Huns return home unmolested because he now feared the overwhelming power of the Visigoths and needed the Huns as a counterweight.²⁵ This version of events, however, is quite clearly a product of literary embellishment added to the battle narrative either by Cassiodorus or Jordanes himself to make Aetius the new crafty Themistocles (the hero of the Greek resistance during the Persian Wars of the fifth century BC, whose exploits are recorded in the *Histories* of the Greek historian Herodotus).

The Herodotean colouring given to Jordanes' narrative was noticed very early by Wallace-Hadrill who observed the similarity of Aetius'

ploy with the unending deceptions, underhandedness and intrigues of Themistocles in Herodotus' narrative of the Greek defeat of the Persians.²⁶ That the Chalons battle narrative in Jordanes is not a factual account of the real battle, but a literary construct based ultimately on a tradition harking back to Herodotus' narrative is made even more obvious by its structure. As in Herodotus' retelling of the Battle of Marathon (an Athenian Greek victory over the Persians), the Huns of Jordanes like the Persians of Herodotus are situated in the middle. The weak Athenian centre in Herodotus, like the supposedly 'unreliable' Alans in Jordanes, who were allegedly placed between the Romans and the Goths because Aetius held them to be suspect, breaks under Persian/Hun pressure. This however allows the two wings to sandwich the Huns/Persians in the centre and save the day. In both accounts no particular credit is given to the left wing (Plataeans/Romans) and all glory is bestowed on the heroic right wing (Goths under Theodorid and the main Athenian army under the war archon Callimachus). Both Theodorid and Callimachus, as if by coincidence, get killed during the battle, leaving the hero Miltiades/Thorismud to secure victory. Then after the victory the Athenians/Goths rapidly return to their home city Athens/Toulouse to secure it from the Persian navy which is aided by Athenian traitors who send a signal by raising a shield/sedition at home threatening Thorismud.²⁷ The sequence of events, troop deployments and deeds attributed to participants in Jordanes' narrative exactly matches that of the Marathon narrative. This is not a coincidence and all this suggests that the information provided by Jordanes regarding the behaviour of key figures in the battle is in most cases artificial, literary constructs.

Interestingly we discover in Jordanes' narrative the curious situation of both Thorismud (Gothic commander after the death of Theodorid, his father) and Aetius losing track of their armies during the battle. According to Jordanes the two commanders had routed the Huns during the day and this forced Attila to withdraw behind the protective ring of his wagon train in desperation. Jordanes then famously makes Attila contemplate suicide via self-immolation on a pile of horse saddles. However, contrary to this image of Roman-Gothic triumph we see both Aetius and Thorismud becoming separated from their respective commands. Thorismud somewhat inexplicably ends up among the Huns during the night after the battle. He is almost killed and dragged from his horse by the Huns before being rescued by his followers.²⁸ Aetius also finds himself separated from his men in the confusion of night and wanders about in the midst of the enemy (i.e. Huns, *noctis confusione divisus cum inter hostes medius vagaretur*), until he finds refuge in the Visigothic camp. He feared, according to Jordanes himself, that a disaster had happened.²⁹

If the day had ended in a Roman-Visigoth victory, as Jordanes insists, it is difficult to understand how both allied commanders could have simultaneously lost track of their armies and ended up among the Huns. It is clear that these details we find in Jordanes more properly describe not a situation in which the Goths and the Romans are chasing the routed Huns into their camp, but rather the Huns chasing the fugitive allies who had been defeated into the Roman camp. It was presumably during this rout that both Aetius and Thorismud became separated from their rapidly disintegrating armies. That this is actually the real picture is confirmed by the rather curious piece of information in Jordanes that the Huns, after their supposed 'defeat', were unable to approach the Roman camp because of the hail of arrows from the Romans.³⁰ After the battle the camp that experienced a siege was not the Hunnic camp, but the Roman one. Who the victors actually were can easily be guessed. This analysis of the battle is supported by the fact that the Visigoths, as mentioned earlier, retreat to Toulouse immediately after the battle and Aetius the overall commander sends away his Frankish allies.³¹

What is more, the only archaeological relic of the battle found near Chalons is a Hunnic cauldron. This may again be an indication that the Huns had possession of the battlefield after the battle. The cauldron was used probably for the burial of Attila's relative Laudaricus, the most high-ranking battle casualty on the Hun side, after the battle.³²

Other Greco-Roman sources are either cursory or ambiguous about the results of the great battle. The *Gallic Chronicle of 452* talks about the great slaughter, *gravi clade inflicta*, and nothing else. It attributes victory to the Romans. The *Chronicle of 511* however, which without a doubt used the earlier chronicle as a source, does not mention a Roman victory or a Hunnic defeat and writes that the Patrician Aetius and Theodoric, king of the Goths fought against Attila, king of the Huns at Mauriacus where Theodoric and Laudaricus, a blood relative of Attila, were killed.³³ The more precise and accurate details that this latter chronicle provides indicate that it is based on a more reliable source/sources than the terse details found in the *Chronicle of 452*, and is probably a reflection of the actual situation. The fact that Attila chose to return with most of his army to his home base in the Danubian region after the battle led chroniclers like the Gallic chronicler of 452, the contemporary Roman poet Sidonius Apollinaris and the bishop Hydatius based in Spain (as well as many modern historians) to attribute a pyrrhic victory to the Romans. Prosper of Aquitaine, a contemporary source, provides us with the clearest insight into how the Romans assessed the outcome of the battle. Prosper records that the slaughter was incalculable – for neither side

gave way – and ‘it appears that the Huns were defeated in this battle because those among them that survived lost their taste for fighting and *turned back home*’.³⁴ In other words the Romans claimed victory, not because the outcome necessarily favoured them, but because the main Hunnic army returned home without advancing further into Gaul. This was interpreted as a victory and Aetius and the Visigoths were credited with having ‘stopped’ the Huns.

However, as already noted earlier the Huns did not commence their march eastward to their home territory due to the results of the battle of Chalons. After a long, drawn out siege at Orléans that failed due to the tenacity of Alan resistance and otherwise having largely fulfilled his initial objectives, that is the conquest of the Franks, (although the reluctance of Aetius to engage him in battle until that point had deprived him of the decisive encounter he had wanted) Attila was already withdrawing east when Aetius and the Visigoths suddenly gave chase. Quite obviously the Romans must have interpreted the Hunnic withdrawal as an opportunity for a counter-attack and they leapt at the chance to hit the ‘retreating’ Huns. What is interesting is that steppe armies throughout history employed the tactic of the feigned retreat to deceive a cautious enemy, reluctant to commit troops to battle, into attacking. The battle of Chalons could therefore either be the result of a feigned retreat (typical steppe strategy) by the Huns in order to draw the evasive Romans into a decisive battle or a pursuit by the allied army under Aetius of the Hunnic army already returning to winter bases in Hungary.

Therefore, the return of the main Hunnic army to the Danubian region was by no means the result of a military defeat. The main body of the Huns, as was their standard practice, simply returned to their home base after the successful conclusion of the campaigning season. We see this pattern also in Attila’s campaign against the Eastern Romans in 447 AD and again in the following Italian campaign of 452 AD, when he withdrew from Italy without taking either Ravenna or Rome, which lay defenceless before his army. Furthermore, the Huns did not in fact completely withdraw from Gaul after Chalons.

Jordanes records a story about the Visigoths beating off a second Hunnic invasion, after Chalons and the Hunnic invasion of Italy in 452 AD (*Getica* 43.226–8). Historians have pointed out that from a military point of view this is highly implausible, since two invasions from Hungary in the same year are not likely to be feasible. It is clear then that this force that attacked the Visigoths and Alans in central Gaul cannot be the main Hunnic force that invaded Italy in that same year. They were a contingent of Huns left behind in Gaul to mop up the situation after the departure of the main Hunnic force in 451 AD. The fact that the battle takes place in the Loire region further west than

Chalons is again indicative of the fact that the battle of Chalons had ended in a Hunnic victory which allowed this Hunnic force to penetrate further west in the following year.

That the war in Gaul had ended in a Hunnic victory is further supported by the fact that when in 452 AD Attila invaded Italy, Aetius was not able to offer him any resistance. The *Gallic Chronicle of 452* records that resistance to the Huns collapsed completely and Aetius forever lost his *auctoritas*.³⁵ Aetius actually advised the emperor to abandon Italy altogether to escape the Hunnic onslaught. The Hydatius Chronicle, which is hardly reliable, records that Marcian, the Eastern Roman emperor, sent auxiliaries to assist Aetius and invents the pleasant fiction that the Huns were slaughtered by plague and the army of Marcian: *missis per Marcianum principem Aetio duce caeduntur auxiliis pariterque in sedibus suis et caelestibus plagis et per Marciani subiuguntur exercitum*. Hydatius in the above passage even seems to contemplate an Eastern Roman invasion of Hunnic territory north of the Danube (if *sedibus suis* is indicating Hunnic home territory north of the Danube that is) in 452 AD by Marcian's East Roman army.

This of course clearly cannot be true because the old East Roman territory south of the Danube was still beyond Eastern Roman government control years later in the mid 450s. The region was under the control of the Huns and their subjects who had moved into the area after or more likely before the abrogation of the treaty agreed to between Attila and the Roman envoys Anatolius and Nomus by Emperor Marcian in 450 AD. Hydatius was indulging in wishful thinking, since there is no record elsewhere of any Roman resistance in Italy. Prosper gives us an entirely different picture from Hydatius about the actual realities of 452 AD. He notes that the emperor, senate and people of Rome could think of no other way out of the danger except submission and the payment of tribute to the Huns.³⁶ The *Gallic Chronicles of 452* and *511* also have nothing to say about the efforts of Aetius and Marcian to defend Italy, which were undoubtedly negligible. There are no records of any victories won by the Romans in open battle with the Huns. Marcian probably just claimed victory because the Huns at the end of their campaigning season, as was their standard practice, withdrew to winter quarters in Hungary, laden with plunder and tribute from the bishop of Rome. Since subjecting the Romans to tribute and vassalage was the main aim of the Hunnic invasion, it can be said that the campaign was largely a successful one for Attila and his Huns. Indeed Priscus, who is almost always more reliable than other contemporary sources when it comes to the Huns, sums up the events of 452 as follows: after having 'enslaved Italy' Attila returned to his own territories. No hint of any defeat or military reverse suffered by the Huns is present in Priscus.

Furthermore, contrary to the bravado of Hydatius, according to Priscus, who being an Eastern Roman is certainly more reliable a source concerning matters in the east than Hydatius who was far away west in Spain, the supposedly victorious Marcian dreaded the coming encounter with the Huns in 453 AD.³⁷ This is far from the image of a triumphal emperor that one would expect, if Hydatius' account of multiple Roman victories was true. As in the case of the emperor Theodosius who preceded him, Marcian, according to Priscus, was saved by divine intervention, the incredible good luck of Attila dying in 453 AD right before his intended attack on Constantinople. The civil war within the Hunnic Empire that followed nullified for a while the threat from the Huns.

That the East Romans were hardly capable of resisting the Huns in 453 AD is shown by the fact that Roman reoccupation of territory seized by the Huns south of the Danube only began ca. 458 AD nearly four years after the commencement of the Hunnic civil war³⁸ and five years after the death of Attila. More than ten years after the death of Attila and the fragmentation of the Hunnic Empire, the Eastern Romans were still having difficulty containing even a minor Hunnic warlord such as Hormidac who operated well south of the Danube and sacked the city of Sardica. The disastrous effect that the Hunnic invasions had on both halves of the Roman Empire is clearly shown by what happened in 454 AD. The Vandal king Geiseric invaded Italy and went on to sack Rome with a ferocity that would make the name Vandal infamous. Neither of the emperors could do anything about this outrage. It was not until 467 AD that the Eastern Roman Empire could again assemble its forces for a punitive expedition against the Vandals. The military losses incurred by the defeats Rome suffered at the hands of Attila the Hun left the Roman army largely impotent for well over a decade.

Quite fittingly Attila's foes, the Romans and the Goths, through whose words we are forced to reconstruct the history of the Huns, have described the final demise of the Hunnic king in suitably dramatic language. According to Jordanes, who is citing Priscus:

he took in marriage a very beautiful girl named Ildico, after countless other wives, as was the custom of his race. He had given himself up to excessive joy at his wedding, and as he lay on his back, heavy with wine and sleep, a rush of superfluous blood, which would ordinarily have flowed from his nose, streamed in deadly course down his throat and killed him, since it was hindered in the usual passages. Thus did drunkenness put a disgraceful end to a king renowned in war. On the following day, when a great part of the morning was spent, the royal attendants suspected some ill and, after a great uproar, broke in the doors. There they found the death of Attila accomplished by an effusion of blood, without any wound, and the girl with downcast face weeping beneath her veil. Then, as is the custom of that race, they plucked out the hair of their heads and made their faces hideous with deep wounds, that the renowned warrior might be mourned, not by

effeminate wailings and tears, but by the blood of men. Moreover a wondrous thing took place in connection with Attila's death. For in a dream some god stood at the side of Marcian, emperor of the east, while he was disquieted about his fierce foe, and showed him the bow of Attila broken in that same night, as if to intimate that the race of Huns owed much to that weapon. This account the historian Priscus says he accepts upon truthful evidence. For so terrible was Attila thought to be to great empires that the gods announced his death to rulers as a special boon. We shall not omit to say a few words about the many ways in which his shade was honored by his race. His body was placed in the midst of a plain and lay in state in a silken tent as a sight for men's admiration. The best horsemen of the entire tribe of the Huns rode around in circles, after the manner of circus games, in the place to which he had been brought and told of his deeds in a funeral dirge in the following manner: 'The chief of the Huns, King Attila, born of his sire Mundiuch, lord of bravest tribes, sole possessor of the Scythian and German realms – powers unknown before – captured cities and terrified both empires of the Roman world and, appeased by their prayers, took annual tribute to save the rest from plunder. And when he had accomplished all this by the favor of fortune, he fell, not by wound of the foe, nor by treachery of friends, but in the midst of his nation at peace, happy in his joy and without sense of pain. Who can rate this as death, when none believes it calls for vengeance?' When they had mourned him with such lamentations, a *strava*, as they call it, was celebrated over his tomb with great revelling. They gave way in turn to the extremes of feeling and displayed funereal grief alternating with joy. Then in the secrecy of night they buried his body in the earth. They bound his coffins, the first with gold, the second with silver and the third with the strength of iron, showing by such means that these three things suited the mightiest of kings; iron because he subdued the nations, gold and silver because he received the honors of both empires. They also added the arms of foemen won in the fight, trappings of rare worth, sparkling with various gems, and ornaments of all sorts whereby princely state is maintained. And that so great riches might be kept from human curiosity, they slew those appointed to the work – a dreadful pay for their labor; and thus sudden death was the lot of those who buried him as well as of him who was buried.

(*Getica* 49.254–8, translation from Charles C. Mierow)

The death of the great Hun king was also celebrated in Norse mythology via the legend of Gudrun, a femme fatale who marries Atli (Attila), but ends up assassinating him and her sons by Atli in revenge for the deaths of her family members slain earlier by Atli. Curiously enough the name Atli became one of the alternative names of the Norse deity Thor, the son of Odin. Odin himself would later be portrayed as a conquerer from Asia whose sons were given Sweden and Denmark as personal possessions. Attila and his Huns were evidently already the subjects of legend in the Early Middle Ages. In the famous *Nibelungenlied* Attila again appears in Germanic legend as the noble king Etzel of the Huns. Here he is not assassinated by his wife as in the Gudrun saga, but is the last man standing after the bloodbath unleashed by his vengeful wife Kriemhild on the Burgundians. The annihilation of the historic Burgundians by the Huns during the time of Attila is thought to have facilitated the creation this later legend.

NOTES

- 1 Croke (1981), 167.
- 2 Priscus, fr. 9.1, Blockley (1983), 235.
- 3 Priscus, fr. 2; 9.3, Blockley (1983), 227, 238
- 4 Marcellinus Comes, Croke (1995), 19.
- 5 Theophanes *Chron.* a.m. 5942.
- 6 Burgess (2001a), 80; Muhlberger (1990), 174. One hundred cities says Callinicus, v. *Hypatius*, 139.21 ff., see Croke (1995), 88.
- 7 Theophanes *Chron.* a.m. 5942.
- 8 See Lee (2000), 41–2, and Whitby (2000c), 709.
- 9 Marcellinus Comes 447.2, Croke (1995), 19; Thompson (1948), 94.
- 10 Priscus, fr. 9.3 (*Exc. de Leg. Gent.* 3), Blockley (1983), 236–40.
- 11 Croke (1981), 163.
- 12 See Lenski (2015), 230–46, esp. 245.
- 13 Priscus, fr. 11.1, Blockley (1983), 242.
- 14 Priscus, fr. 20, 1 (*Exc. de Leg. Gent.* 7), Blockley (1983), 304–6. The Priscan origin of this fragment is doubted by Christensen (2002), 340, on the grounds that its focus on Geiseric, thus Goths, and Honoria, smacks of Cassiodorus/Jordanes, not Priscus. He is definitely correct.
- 15 The Franks during this time were divided into several groups.
- 16 Priscus, fr. 20, 3 (*Exc. de Leg. Gent.* 7), Blockley (1983), 306.
- 17 Malalas, xiv, p. 358; *Chron. Pasch.* i, p. 587. See also Priscus, fr. 21, Blockley (1983), 309 and Jeffreys et al. (trans.) (1986), 195.
- 18 Holmes and Evans (2006), 36–7.
- 19 Parker (1995), 64.
- 20 *Getica* 35.182.
- 21 *Chron. Pasch.*, 587 ff., Blockley (1983), 308.
- 22 Barnish (1992), 41.
- 23 Merrills and Miles (2010), 28.
- 24 *Getica* 40.209.
- 25 *Getica* 41.216. Thompson (1996), 155–6, and Kelly (2009), 197–8, passively accept this representation given by Jordanes.
- 26 Wallace-Hadrill (1962), 60–3.
- 27 Hdt. 6.111–121.
- 28 *Getica* 40.211.
- 29 *Getica* 40.212
- 30 *Getica* 40.213.
- 31 Gregory of Tours 2.7; *Chron. Min.* I, p. 302. Thompson (1996), 156.
- 32 *Gallie Chronicle of 511*, Burgess (2001b), 97; Bona (2002), 57; Marin (1990), 45; Érdy (1995), 17–18.
- 33 Burgess (2001b), 86.
- 34 Prosper a. 451, Murray (2000), 73.
- 35 Muhlberger (1990), 122, 189. See also Collins (1999), 86.
- 36 Prosper a. 452, Murray (2000), 73–4.
- 37 Priscus, fr. 24.1, Blockley (1983), 317.
- 38 Maenchen-Helfen (1973), 161–2. See also Liebeschuetz (2007), 105, for the slow reconstruction of Roman fortifications in the Lower Danubian region which began only in the late 450s AD.

6 THE HUNS AFTER ATTLA

HUNNIC CIVIL WAR AND THE DISSOLUTION OF THE HUNNIC EMPIRE

The death of Attila the Hun was followed by a bitter civil war between his many sons and other powerful Hunnic nobles over the vast inheritance that he had left behind. Until the death of Attila, the Hunnic Empire had for around 80 years continued to expand over most of continental Europe at a breathtaking speed. This continued unrelenting expansion is indicative of the relative absence of serious internal political conflict. The demands made by the Hunnic kings Bleda and Attila to the Romans requesting the return of fugitives from the Hunnic Empire show that as in most other steppe empires the Hunnic Empire regularly witnessed political purges upon the accession of a new ruler, who in order to consolidate power clamped down on establishment figures from the previous reign whose positions now needed to be redistributed to the next generation of grandees. This is hardly exceptional in imperial politics and the occasional execution of disaffected or disenfranchised noblemen or minor princes hardly affected the stability of the Hun Empire.

However, Attila's ascent to supreme power in the mid 440s AD drastically shook the fundamental make-up of the Hun state. Not only did he violently usurp the throne from the supreme ruler (that is his brother Bleda), but in order to successfully carry out his usurpation of power he seems to have relied inordinately on the support of the tribal groups in the western half of the Hun state such as the Gepids to suppress the eastern tribes that supported Bleda. Attila was so dependent on the Gepids that one Greco-Roman source actually calls him a Gepid Hun.¹ These western tribes, principally grouped around Hungary, had until the usurpation of Attila been the fringe elements within the Hunnic power structure, which had favoured the eastern tribes in the Ukrainian steppe zone. That the usurpation of Attila was no minor palace affair like all previous political squabbles is shown by the massive revolt planned by the powerful Akatziri Huns, the principal Hunnic tribe in the east, against Attila. The rebellion was suppressed before it became politically damaging to the Hunnic

Empire. However, throughout the reign of Attila one sees consistently the favouring of nobles from the west of the Hunnic Empire over those from the east. Attila's key nobles Onegesius, Ardaric, Edeco, and Valamer were all western notables whose power base was located close to the Carpathian basin to which Attila now permanently moved the Hunnic centre of government. It is therefore no accident that after Attila's death a civil war would arise between two coalitions, one headed by the Gepids in the west (who had enjoyed the limelight at the very heart of the Hun Empire under Attila) and the other headed by the Akatziri in the east (who had been disaffected and excluded from the centres of power upon Bleda's assassination by Attila and now wished to make a comeback). Attila's usurpation and favouring of the west over the east, which reversed the traditional alignment and distribution of power within steppe empires therefore had catastrophic consequences for the political stability of the Hun Empire after his death, as well as the sudden nature of his death which left him no time to resolve the issue of succession and organize an orderly transfer of power to a designated heir(s).

The disaffected Hunnic princes and nobles who had kept quiet during Attila's reign now all started to clamour for attention and the principal power brokers sought to resolve the question by force of arms. Thus an unprecedented internal military conflict arose and this had fatal consequences for the unity of the Hun Empire. Traditional historiography had presented this civil war within the Hunnic Empire as a war of liberation fought by Germanic peoples led by King Ardaric of the Gepids to free themselves from the Turkic Huns led by Attila's chosen heir Ellac. This is hardly an accurate description of the war however. The identity of all the principal actors in the great political drama that unfolded during the post-Attila Hunnic civil wars bears witness to a strife over fief distribution among Hunnic princes, not a revolt among Germanic subjects against their Hunnic rulers. The confusion about the nature of the conflicts following Attila's death was due to the erroneous assumption that the key figures with Germanic sounding names mentioned in the *Getica* of Jordanes, our principal source on these events, were native leaders of Germanic ethnic origin. These men were in fact, as will be shown below, Hunnic rulers of largely mixed origin. The wars they waged against each other at the head of various Turkic and Germanic tribal confederations were thus civil wars within the Hunnic system that lead to the dissolution of that imperial order.

In 454 AD at Nedao Ardaric, king of the Gepids defeated and killed Ellac, the eldest son of Attila and ruler of the Akatziri. But who exactly was this Ardaric and what exactly were the 'Gepids' who defeated Ellac? Contrary to the common belief that the Gepids were a

‘Germanic’ people rebelling against the Huns, archaeology from the area occupied by the Gepids actually shows that the ruling elite of the Gepids were a heterogeneous group displaying some Mongoloid features all throughout the fifth and sixth centuries AD. This was no doubt the result of inter-marriages with the Huns and the presence of actual Huns within the Gepid aristocracy and ruling family. The Gepid elite was culturally and physically the most similar to the Huns from Asia of all the Germanic peoples. Noticeably the practice of Hunnic cranial deformation was extremely common among the Gepids.²

Ardaric the king of these Gepids was able to defeat Ellac because he managed to gain the support of not just his Gepids, but some of the Suebi, Rugii and Sarmatians as well.³ Virtually all the tribes in the west seem to have sided with Ardaric against those of the east.⁴ But why does Ardaric feature so prominently in what Jordanes tells us was a feud over fief distribution among Hunnic princes?⁵ The answer is because Ardaric was also most likely a Hunnic prince. The Huns in the traditional Inner Asian manner distributed conquered peoples as fiefs to members of their royal family and senior nobles. The Gepids were a particularly significant fief since they probably formed the core of Attila’s revolt against his brother Bleda and this explains Ardaric’s privileged position within Attila’s retinue and his principal role in the civil war following Attila’s death.

We have already encountered a blood relative of Attila called Laudaricus in our discussion of the battle of Chalons.⁶ His name is the entirely Germanic *Laudareiks* (*Lauda* king)⁷ and this tells us that having a Germanic sounding name is not an indication of one’s ‘Germanic’ ethnicity within the Hunnic Empire. *Laudareiks* was a Hun just like Attila, despite his Germanic name or more probably the Germanicized version of his originally Hunnic name. The Gothic practice of Germanicizing Hunnic names is well known. For instance the Gothic suffix *-ila* was added to the name of the Hunnic king Roas/Ruga (which became Roila/Rugila).⁸ The Turkic names of virtually all the princes who rule Hunnic fiefs in the east such as Attila’s sons Ellac, Ernakh/Irnik and Dengizich, Attila’s kinsmen who reside in the Danubian region after Attila: Emnetzur and Ultzindur (who hold Oescus, Utum and Almus on the right bank of the Danube),⁹ also of Attila’s uncle and father Octar and Mundzuk, and Hunnic royal family members Kursich and Basich, are proof that the original names of the Hunnic princes were Turkic, right up to the time of Attila’s death and beyond, not Germanic. The Germanicization of Hunnic (Oghuric Turkic) names may have been a conscious policy among the Hunnic elite in the west to ease the transition to their rule of formerly independent Germanic tribal unions. The changes in the rendition of the name of the third of Attila’s sons, Dengizich (meaning in Turkic

Lake,¹⁰ with the implied meaning of broad, great) provides us with a good example. Although we know clearly that his name while in the east was the Turkic Dengizich, when he became active in the west his name was pronounced by his Germanic subjects as Dintzic¹¹/Denitsik, reflecting the frequent practice of dropping the *g* in Germanic transliterations of Hunnic names, and was finally changed to the Germanicized Dintzirichus (i.e. Dintzik the *reik*/king).¹²

The name Ardaric is similarly also most probably a Germanicized version of a former Hunnic name (Iranian in origin).¹³ There are numerous Sarmatian names that are attested which closely resemble that of Ardaric, e.g. Ardagdakos, Ardarakos, Ardariskos, Ardaros, etc. The first element of the name Ardaric *ard* is etymologically related to the Ossetian (the only surviving language that derives directly from ancient Alan and possibly Sarmatian)¹⁴ term *ard*, meaning oath. To this was added the Germanic suffix *reik*, through the usual practice of Germanicizing Hunnic/Alanic names.¹⁵ His name would thus mean a king bound by an oath (oath king), which instantly reminds us of Jordanes' repeated assertion that Ardaric shared in Attila's plans and was famous due to his great loyalty to the Hun king.¹⁶ What could be a greater assurance of loyalty than an oath of loyalty? The term *ard* also had connotations of the divine in the Alan language (as in the case of the name Ardabourios) and was associated with the sacred.¹⁷ Thus it is a term designating the sacred nature of an oath of loyalty to one's sovereign. The hybrid nature of Ardaric's name and also those of other Hun nobles in the west also draws from the common Central Asian use of hybrid names that combined elements from different languages as a means of political and social expediency.¹⁸ The name Ardaric was therefore an expedient name, not necessarily even a personal name, but a court title (meaning loyal king, bound by an oath of loyalty to Attila). That he possesses a hybrid name rather than a straightforward Gothic or some other East Germanic name is indicative of the fact that he was not a native Germanic ruler, but a Hun ruler imposed on the Gepids by the conquering Huns.

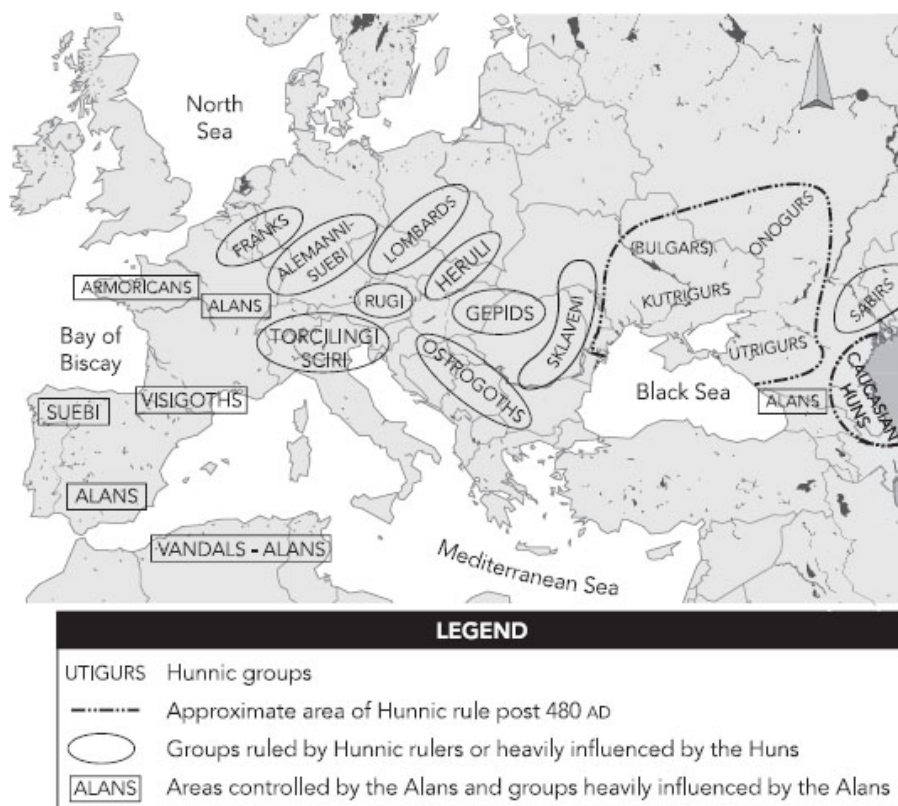
That Ardaric was a member of the high Hunnic aristocracy is further evidenced by the fact that one of Ardaric's grandsons Mundo, the nephew of the Gepid king Trapstila (or Thraustila), was called both a Gepid and a Hun and was in fact a descendant of both Attila and Ardaric.¹⁹ Pohl points out that Mundo was the son of a son of Attila who married a daughter of Ardaric.²⁰ This implies that Ardaric had royal Hunnic connections either by marriage or by birth. The Icelandic *Hervararsaga* which many historians agree preserves some faint historical memory of fifth century events provides us with more information on who Ardaric actually was and why he engaged in war against the 'Huns'. The saga tells us that Heithrek king of the Goths

had two sons, Angantyr (whose mother is not mentioned) and Hloth from his marriage to a Hunnic princess, the daughter of Humli, king of the Huns. Heithrek has been identified by some historians with none other than Ardaric,²¹ but from what happens next in the saga it is more likely that it is his son Angantyr who is Ardaric. The saga relates that Hloth the son of the Hunnic wife who had grown up at the court of his Hunnic maternal grandfather demanded an equal share of the Goths after the death of Heithrek, his father. When Angantyr refused to accept the demand the Huns attacked to enforce the rights of Hloth by force, but were vanquished. Both Hloth and Humli, the Hun king, were killed in the engagement with the Goths.²²

The Hunnic civil war was initially started by disputes over inheritance of 'fiefs' among Attila's heirs and the information provided by this saga seems to capture the gist of what actually happened. Ellac (presumably Humli of the saga), the new king of the Huns, when he ascended the throne or attempted to seize the throne after the death of his father would have tried to impose his authority over his father's entire domain by redistributing fiefs to his own supporters. Ardaric, like Angantyr in the saga, either stood to lose from the new settlement imposed by Ellac (i.e. ceding part of his people and territory to Hloth) and consequently revolted or possibly even supported another claimant to the Hunnic throne, perhaps his own son-in-law. This son of Attila (and son-in-law of Ardaric) may have functioned as a king in his own right in the Gepid kingdom which emerged after the end of the civil wars²³ and his presence could provide an explanation for the dual kingship found among the Gepids, which incidentally of course was a conscious imitation of Hunnic political practices. Ardaric was thus not a Germanic 'freedom fighter' against the 'tyrannical' rule of the Huns, but actually as a respected member of the Hunnic royal family, a key player in the succession struggle that followed Attila's death. The fact that the state he established after the battle rapidly became Gepid, not Hunnic despite its Hunnic ruling elite is hardly surprising as the western half of the Hun Empire was almost entirely Germanic in ethnic composition.

However, it is clear that Ardaric continued to use the trappings of Hunnic imperial rule to solidify his control in the Carpathian basin. As noted briefly above, the Gepid political system was identical to the political structure found among the Huns, whereby there is a supreme king in the eastern core territory in the Tisza region, who was supported by a sub-ordinate western king in Sirmium in the now familiar dual system. Under the two Gepid kings there were the dukes (i.e. sub-kings, who each had their own military retinue) such as Omharus of Transylvania. There was also a council of nobles, again in the same manner as among the Huns and other Inner Asian polities,

which limited the power of the king. Interestingly, among the Suebi who were geographically close to the Gepids and who were active in the post-Nedao competition for land in the Danubian region, we also find the residue of Hunnic political influence. They, like the more powerful Gepids to the east, had two kings Hunimund and Alaric (*Getica* 54.277).



MAP 6.1 Post-Hunnic Empire

POST-ATTILA KINGS OF EUROPE

Not only Ardaric, but every other major figure to emerge out of the Hunnic civil war was also like Ardaric of Hunnic provenance or a high-ranking official in the Hunnic imperial court. Edeco, king of the Sciri, was obviously, as Priscus tells us, a Hun.²⁴ After establishing a short-lived Scirian state the tribes he governed would later be responsible for the death of Valamer, the founding king of the Ostrogoths.²⁵ Edeco's son Odoacer, whose ancestry was likewise Hunnic founded the first 'barbarian' kingdom in Italy and delivered the coup-de-grâce on what remained of the Western Roman Empire.

The Hunnic identity of the famous Odoacer and his father Edeco is elaborated in detail in the author's previous book on the Huns: *The Huns, Rome and the Birth of Europe* (Kim, 2013). In this book, because of the lack of space it is not possible to cite every evidence and argument in favour of this identification. However, to list the most pertinent evidence, the tribe with which he is affiliated most closely is the clearly Turkic (i.e. Hunnic) tribe of the Torcilingi (*Getica* 46.242.). Both Jordanes on multiple occasions and likewise the Lombard historian Paul the Deacon²⁶ make this identification clear and Jordanes by mentioning also in his narrative the Thuringians (Thuringos/Thoringos (*Getica* 55.280)), disqualifies any erroneous conjecture that he had confused the Torcilingi with the Germanic Thuringi.

Jordanes mentions the Torcilingi three times in relation to Odoacer's conquest of Italy²⁷ and the tribal name is quite visibly etymologically linked to names of earlier eastern tribes such as the *Turcae* (first century AD tribe in the Azov region, southern Russia)²⁸ and *Tyrcae* (a people in the same area).²⁹ Then there is the name *Torci* (also *Turqui*) given by Frankish historian Fredegar in the middle of the seventh century AD when referring to a clearly Hunnic people in the Danubian region.³⁰ It is obvious that the name *Torci* and the *Torcilingi* are identical: *Torc* + connecting vowel *i* + Germanic suffix *-ling*. The etymological links between the name *Torc/Torci* and the name *Turk* are also undeniable. The name *Turk* was frequently rendered *Torc* or *Tork*, as in *Tork*³¹ (designating a Western Oghuz Turkic tribe that fought for the Kievan Rus as part of the so-called Chernii Kloboutsii confederation),³² as late as the twelfth century AD.

Odoacer is furthermore identified with another group with possible Hunnic origins, the *Rogi*. Jordanes calls Odoacer 'by race a Rogian', *genere Rogus*³³ and refers to the tyranny of the king (i.e. Odoacer) of the *Torcilingi* and *Rogi*, *sub Regis Torcilingorum Rogorumque tyrannide*.³⁴ These *Rogians* have been identified by most scholars with the Germanic *Rugi* on the Baltic Sea region. However, this identification derives from the preconception that Odoacer was a Germanic king and therefore the groups associated with him must be Germanic. Rather it is more likely that *genere Rogus* refers to Odoacer's affiliation with the clan/tribe of *Ruga/Roga*, the Hunnic king and uncle of Attila the Hun. We know for instance that the Hunnic *Ultzinzures*, a group that lived along the Danube around 454 AD, was named after *Ultzindur* the relative of Attila.³⁵ The *Rogi* were probably also a group named after *Roga/Ruga* the great Hunnic king who was the first of the Hun kings to rule over all of Germania. An association with *Ruga* therefore carried some prestige in wider Germania, hence the adoption of this name by this probably mixed group of Huns and

Germanic tribesmen.

The name of Odoacer's father Edeco/Edico³⁶ or Edica has no Germanic etymology and it is clearly a non-Germanic name. It does, however, have excellent Turco-Mongol etymologies. For instance, the name is probably linked to the old Turkish name ädǧü³⁷ (meaning 'good') and the Mongolic Edǧü.³⁸ Odoacer's own name may be etymologically linked to the name of the Hunnic prince Octar, the brother of Ruga and Mundzuk, and the Turkic name Ot-toghar.³⁹ The name of his son Oklan is without a doubt the Turkic Oghlan (Tur. youth).⁴⁰ The name of Odoacer's brother is Hunoulphus (the Hun wolf). The association of virtually every individual and tribe closest to Odoacer with the Huns is a clear indication of his Hunnic origin. Both Edeco and his son Odoacer, however, were like all other Huns, probably highly mixed (racially and ethnically) and possessed a heterogeneous identity. Odoacer was probably mostly Scirian in terms of blood lineage on his mother's side and mainly a Turkic Hun on his father's side.

The third important figure to emerge from the Hunnic civil war was Valamer, the king of the Ostrogoths. He too was a Hunnic prince/noble like Ardaric and Edeco mentioned above. Again a full discussion of Valamer's Hunnic origins cannot be included here and I must refer the reader to my previous book on the Huns. However, Valamer's career is intimately intertwined with the history of the post-Attila Huns, with Attila's son Dengizich in particular. Therefore, a brief overview of his Hunnic origin and conflict with Dengizich will be provided here.

Jordanes presents Valamer as the legitimate heir of the old East Gothic ruling house, the Amal dynasty. Closer examination of the available evidence suggests otherwise. Valamer's dynasty was in reality a new dynasty imposed on the Goths, not the continuation of the house of King Ermanaric which had ruled the Goths before the Hunnic conquest.⁴¹ As Heather rightfully points out, the Hunnic conquest had profound implications for the former political order of the Goths before conquest.⁴² Ermanaric's name was at some point inserted into Valamer's genealogy in order to make him and his dynasty look more genuinely Gothic. The 80 years of Hunnic domination, which without a doubt had a significant impact on the Ostrogothic royal line, was thus downplayed.⁴³

When one examines the Amal genealogy in the *Getica* (14.17) however, it quickly becomes apparent that many of these kings are in reality not Gothic kings at all, but Hunnic rulers. The name of the second king Hulmul is probably linked etymologically to the name Humli, king of the Huns, which we have seen in the Icelandic saga about the conflict between Ardaric and Ellac.⁴⁴ The fourth king Amal

and the sixth Ostrogotha are obviously eponymous figures invented as ancestors of the Amal clan and Ostrogoths respectively. The fifth ruler Hisarnis, 'the iron one', is mythical like the first king Gapt.⁴⁵ However, the well-known cult of iron and blacksmithing in Inner Asian steppe cultures (e.g. the name Temujin (Genghis/Chinggis Khan) meaning 'man of iron') suggests that this name too may have a steppe Hunnic origin or has been influenced by steppe traditions. The Ostrogothic royal genealogy is simply full of Hunnic figures and figures possibly co-opted from Hunnic tradition.

The Hunnic origin of this dynasty is made even more apparent by the name of the first clearly non-divine ancestor of the Amals in their genealogy,⁴⁶ Hunuil. Hunuil is most likely a Turkic term combining the imperial name *Hun* with *il* meaning people or state in Turkish, as in *Türkmen ili* (the Turkmen people) and *Özbek ili* (Uzbek people). Such a term would not make any sense as a personal name, but as we can see in the cases of Ostrogotha and Amal, these names are not personal names but eponymous attributions based on names of peoples and clans. In the Amal genealogy we find eponymous names that indicate the ruling dynasty's affiliation with the political entity/people of the Ostrogoths (Ostrogotha) and the clan or sub-tribe of the Amals (Amal). If the dynasty was originally Hunnic we can then expect this fact also to be reflected by an eponymous name such as Hunuil (meaning Hunnic people/empire/state).⁴⁷

The wide diffusion of royal names ending in *-ulf* (wolf) after Hunuil in the Amal genealogy may also be significant. The wolf is the quintessential Turco-Mongol totem and mythical ancestor. It was also the name given to imperial bodyguards in the contemporaneous Rouran Khaganate in Mongolia and Turkestan, which co-existed with the Hun Empire. The wolf totem appears widely in early southern Siberian art, especially Altaian art and iconography in the first and second centuries AD. This was of course the region from which the Huns would later begin their long trek west.⁴⁸ The origin myth of the Tiele (Gaoche) Turkic tribes in the old territory of the Huns also talks of the union of a daughter of a Xiongnu/Hun shanyu and a wolf that gave birth to their ruling house. The wolf was also the totemic ancestor of the Onoghurs who were intimately associated with the later Bulgars ruled by Attila's descendants.⁴⁹ The Bulgar prince list calls the founding hero of Great Bulgaria (Kubrat) Kurt, meaning wolf in Turkish (*qurt*).⁵⁰ The ancestress of the Ashina clan of the Göktürks who rose to prominence in former Hunnic lands in the east a century after the Huns is said to have been a she-wolf.⁵¹ In contrast to this prevalence of wolf related myths and imagery in the Hunnic and associated Turkic settings, there is hardly any precedent for the wolf being viewed as an ancestor or holy animal among the Germanic

peoples, though names with the element 'ulf' (e.g. the mid fourth century AD name Ulfilas), do seem to appear before the arrival of the Huns. The popularization of names ending with -ulf, however, begins during the Hunnic period and the preponderance of names ending in -ulf in the Amal genealogy perhaps cannot be viewed as a coincidence.⁵² There is the additional possibility that the names with the -ulf suffix are Gothic adaptations of similar-sounding Hunnic names ending in -ulf, e.g. Katulf, the name of a White Hun in Central Asia.

The name of Hunuil's son Athal(a)⁵³ is possibly linked to the Germanic/Gothic word for nobility Adel, but there is also an Old Turkic etymology: *Adal* meaning take a name, an appellation commonly given to sons before they attain a famous name for themselves through a great deed.⁵⁴ Interestingly in the Ostrogothic royal house a very similar custom was practiced whereby young princes were not given names in infancy. They earned their appellation (e.g. Theodoric/king of the people, Thrasaric/king of the warriors, etc.) and given the preponderance of actual titles in Hunnic names, it is likely that this was also true among the Huns. Another possible etymology for the name Athal, if we adopt the form of the name with the -a ending found in Cassiodorus, is none other than Attila! The similarity between the two names may even possibly have invited conflation when the Hunnic name was Germanicized.

If that was not enough to provide a strong case for the Hunnic origin of the Ostrogothic royal house, there is still more. Berig/k (Tur. strong), the name of one of Attila's Hunnic magnates in Priscus, which we have encountered earlier, somewhat perplexingly appears as the name of the ancestor Gothic king who supposedly led the Goths out of Scandinavia, Berig.⁵⁵ Christensen reasonably identifies the name Berig as either a borrowing from Hunnic or perhaps Celtic.⁵⁶ The name and the associated legend is unlikely to be Celtic, given the vast time gap between Cassius Dio, the source which mentions a similar Celtic name in Britain, and the time of Jordanes, but Priscus was without a doubt a source that Jordanes directly used. It is highly probable that like many of the other Amal 'Gothic' ancestors, Berig too was originally a Hunnic ancestor figure, who led not the Gothic migration from the north, but the Hunnic migration to the west from Inner Asia. All this reveals that what we have in the Amal genealogy is the dynastic tradition of the Hunnic royal family superimposed on the vague memory of the Goths migrating from somewhere in the north.

Also, according to Jordanes, the first known king of the Huns in Europe was a certain Balamber, the 'King of the Huns' during the late fourth century AD. It has been suspected that this Balamber was actually the same person as the Ostrogoth Valamer in the mid fifth

century AD, whose name in Greek was written βαλαμης (Balamer).⁵⁷ Interestingly in Jordanes the Hunnic Balamber kills Vinitharius, allegedly an Amal Goth and grandfather of Valamer, with the help of another Gothic princeling called Gesimund, son of Hunimund. Balamber then takes as his wife Vadamerca, the dead man's granddaughter. Given the fact that Vinitharius' name means Wend fighter (i.e. Slav fighter, Slavs who only emerge in our sources from the late fifth century AD onwards) he is clearly not a fourth century enemy of the Hunnic Balamber-Valamer, but a mid fifth century figure at the time when the 'Gothic' Balamber-Valamer was active. This is confirmed yet again by the fact that Vinitharius is reputed to have campaigned against the fifth century Slavic Antes who only started to move into the southern Ukraine and Moldavia from somewhere in the north long after the Hunnic conquest.⁵⁸ It therefore becomes clear that the events relating to Gesimund, Balamber and Vinitharius are fifth century events that have been artificially pushed back into the fourth century to make a single individual the Hunnic-Gothic king Valamer, a separate Hunnic Balamber (fourth century) and Gothic Valamer (fifth century).

Vinitharius who was killed by Balamber (Valamer) was entered into the Amal genealogy as the father of Vandalarius, the father of Valamer (Balamber) (*Getica*, 14.79). The fact that Balamber/Valamer married Vinitharius' grand-daughter after defeating him must have contributed to this bizarre phenomenon of Vinitharius the victim being transformed into the grandfather of his killer. In fact the game is given away by a statement in a later passage (*Getica* 48.252) where Jordanes leaves out both Vinitharius and Vinitharius' father Valaravrans from the 'Amal' ancestry and calls Vandalarius the son of a brother of Ermanaric, that is Vultuulf. This shows that Vinitharius and his father have been inserted into the Amal genealogy to make the Hunnic 'Amals', Gothic Amals.

Now who then are Vultuulf and Vandalarius, the grandfather and father of Valamer the Ostrogothic king? We have already noted earlier the Gothic practice of Germanizing or Gothifying Hunnic royal names by adding Germanic suffixes. Thus the Germanic suffix -ila was added to names like Attila and Rugila (Ruga), and Dengizich becomes Dintzirich by adding the Germanic suffix -reik (king). In addition even the names themselves were on occasions substituted by similar sounding Gothic names. By way of example the name of Attila's father Mundzuk/Munčuq (pearl/jewel (tur.)) was turned into Mundiuks⁵⁹ with the *dz* sound altered to make the name sound more Gothic, like the *mund* element in Gothic names such as Munderich. Attila's own name was also altered from Tur. *As-til-a* (great river/sea)⁶⁰ to a more Gothic sounding *atta-ila* (little father) in the same way.

The name of Vultuulf, the grandfather of Valamer, was probably subjected to the same process. The name is a combination of two elements Vult and the suffix -ulf, as in Hun-oulphus (-ulf, the Germanic word for wolf). Now the Vult component appears in Gothic names such as Sigis-vultus (Ostrogothic, fifth century).⁶¹ Vultus (Gothic *wulþus*) means grandeur/fame. So Vultuulf would be *wulþ(u)-wulfs*, 'famous/glorious wolf'. However, we also know from our sources that the *Vu-* in Vult was often rendered Uld as in Gib-uldus and Uldida.⁶² We need not search long to realise that there is a plethora of Hunnic names with the element Uld/Ult in our sources for the fifth and sixth centuries: Uld-in, Ult-zin-cur (Ernak's cousin), Ult-zia-giri (Hunnic tribal name),⁶³ Ould-ak (Hunnic general in the East Roman army in 550 AD), etc. The name Vultuulf therefore, despite its Gothic appearance, is in all likelihood, especially given the Hunnic identity of Valamer, Vultuulf's grandson, a Hunnic name that has been gothified (Hunnic name Uld/t+Germanic suffix ulf, then assimilated into the more familiar Gothic word *wulþus* to form Vultuulf). What is fascinating is the fact that in the early fifth century when Vultuulf must have been active we find the Hunnic sub-king Uld-in (*in* in his name being a Greek suffix added to his name), who died ca. 410 AD. Equally fascinating is the fact that Germanic names with the element *wulþus* as prefix seem to appear mostly after the career of Uldin, just as the element *iok* (probably deriving from the *juk* or *dzuk* element in Hunnic names such as Mundzuk)⁶⁴ as suffix in Germanic names such as Gundioke appear after the career of the Hunnic prince Mundzuk, the father of Attila. Valamer is thus likely to be a descendant of King Uldin.

This becomes most probable when we consider the name of his supposed son Vandalarius which means 'he who conquered the Vandals'. The Vandals fled from their Central European homeland with the Alans and the Suebi in 405 AD to avoid Hunnic conquest. There is no Ostrogothic king who could have fought the Vandals after the Hunnic conquest of 376 and there is simply no other record anywhere of any conflict between the Ostrogoths and the Vandals around the time that Vandalarius would have been active (early fifth centuries AD). Who could possibly have conquered or beaten the Vandals in the early fifth century? Obviously Uldin who drove them away. Uldin is surely Vultuulf and Vandalarius is presumably his son who participated in the battle against the Vandals ca. 405 AD.

Thus, instead of the anomaly of the Goths being ruled by their own native rulers for all of the 80 years they were under Hunnic domination, we can see that the Ostrogoths were headed by a Hunnic ruler from a Hunnic noble house. Valamer and his brothers Thiudimer and Vidimer were Hunnic fief-holders descended from Uldin.⁶⁵ The

later division of the Ostrogoths between Valamer and his brothers, while recognizing the supremacy of Valamer as high king, is also clearly a continuation of the Hunnic, Inner Asian practice of 'fief' distribution among members of the royal family.⁶⁶

Furthermore, since Valamer and his brothers are Hunnic princes, his cousins, Hunimund the Great, king of the Goths and Suebi, and Hunimund's sons Thorismud and Gesimund in Jordanes' narrative are likewise also Huns and not Goths in origin. None of these individuals therefore have anything to do with Ermanaric and the old ruling family of the Goths other than perhaps via inter-marriage (e.g. the marriage of Valamer to Vinitharius' grand-daughter). Revealingly in a document dated to early 533 AD Cassiodorus, who probably provided Jordanes with some of the genealogy which we find in the *Getica*, does not include either Ermanaric or the Germanic demi-gods of Jordanes in his Amal genealogy.⁶⁷

Since Vandalarius, the father of Valamer, and his brothers did not become a king in his own right after the death of Vultuulf/Uldin, it is possible to assume that Uldin's position as sub-king over the fief consisting mainly of Goths was assumed by Hunimund the Great, a cousin or perhaps nephew of the deceased Uldin, who also controlled the additional fief consisting of the recently conquered Suebi in the west. That Hunimund the Great was a vassal Hunnic king is indicated in his very name, which means literally 'under the suzerainty of the Hun'.⁶⁸ One of his descendants Hunimund king of the Suebi, who quarrels with Valamer and his brothers, presumably over the division of his ancestral fief, also carries the same name. According to Jordanes Gesimund, the son of Hunimund the Great, was faithful to his oath of loyalty to the Huns.⁶⁹ These men were all subordinate sub-kings and fief-holders of the Hunnic Empire, just like the Hun noble Edeco of the Sciri and Ardaric of the Gepids.

The sub-kingship, which was hereditary in this family, passed from Uldin to a cousin or nephew, as in the case of the succession of the nephews Bleda and Attila to Ruga's position, a common feature of Hunnic and Central Asian steppe laws of succession. This understanding makes the record in Cassiodorus (*Variae* 8.9.8, addressed to a certain Tuluin) about the hero Gensemund comprehensible. Many have wondered why this figure is considered by some of the Goths as eligible for kingship. This Gensemund ends up deferring to Valamer and is subsequently adopted as a son-at-arms (i.e. vassal) by the new Gothic king. Gensemund is none other than Gesimund, the son of Hunimund, the ally of Balamber who helped Balamber kill Vinitharius, another indication that the Hunnic Balamber is the same person as the Gothic Valamer. Gensemund/Gesimund was considered worthy of kingship precisely because he

represented the senior line of the Hunnic dynasty to which both he and Valamer belonged. Valamer was therefore a member of the cadet branch of the Hunnic royal dynasty that ruled the Goths and also the Suebi.

Jordanes when discussing the ethnogenesis of the Huns tells of how Gothic witches copulated with evil spirits and gave birth to the Huns.⁷⁰ This story implies that the Goths regarded the Huns and themselves or their royal family at least, which as this story indicates must have claimed a sacred or 'devilish' origin in ways reminiscent of the concept of sacred kingship among steppe royal clans, to be blood related.⁷¹ Stories of women conceiving from the attentions of a spirit (in Jordanes' Orthodox Christian view, a demon) to produce a royal dynasty abound in eastern steppe traditions (e.g. the story of Dongmyung of Buyeo (in Manchuria) and the legend of the birth of Bodonchar the ancestor of Chinggis Khan (Mongolia)). The story in Jordanes is thus quite clearly a Hunnic dynastic origin legend that has been reinterpreted by Jordanes. That Gothic women are involved in this legend of dynastic creation should immediately remind us of Balamber/Valamer the Hun's marriage to a Gothic princess. The story of the origin of the Huns is therefore also the story of the origin of Valamer, naturally since he is a Hunnic prince.

One last item of evidence that shows that the events relating to Balamber, Vinitharius and Gesimund, etc. are mid fifth century events and that Valamer and Balamber are the one and same Hunnic prince is that Thorismud, Gesimund's brother and heir to Hunimund's Goths, was killed while fighting the Gepids. Jordanes claims that this event took place in the early years of the fifth century and heralded the beginning of the clearly fictitious 40 year interregnum among the Goths before the elevation of Valamer to the throne in the mid fifth century. However, there was no battle between the Goths and Gepids in the early fifth century when both tribes were under Hunnic rule. The battle in which Thorismud died while fighting the Gepids is clearly the great Battle of Nedao in 454 AD where Thorismud and his Goths fought on behalf of Ellac the son of Attila against Ardaric and his Gepids. In other words there was no 40 years interregnum between Thorismud's death and Valamer's elevation to the throne, it all happened very quickly after 454 AD. Valamer and Balamber were one and the same individual.

We have thus established the Hunnic identity of Valamer, founding king of the Ostrogoths. According to Jordanes, immediately after the death of Attila, Valamer threw off the Hunnic 'yoke', fought against the Huns at Nedao in 454 AD and then defeated Attila's sons sometime after 455 AD. Valamer and his entourage are said to have clashed with the sons of Attila, who regarded him and his Goths as deserters and

runaway slaves. However, Valamer alone, without the assistance of his brothers Thiudimer and Vidimer (both of whom were absent from the battle), still emerged victorious. Jordanes tells us that Valamer then informed his brother Thiudimer about the great victory and that the arrival of this good news happened to coincide with the birth of Theodoric the Great, Thiudimer's son and Valamer's nephew.⁷²

The only problem with this fantastic story in Jordanes of post-Attila Gothic activities is that it is completely false. Theodoric was almost eight years old when he was sent to Constantinople as a hostage in 459 AD.⁷³ Jordanes himself in *Getica* 55.282, tells us that Theodoric was 18 when he returned to his father from Constantinople ca. 469 AD. This would mean he was 20 years old when he captured Singidunum at the head of his army in 471AD. Even if Theodoric was dispatched to Constantinople in 461 AD, not 459 AD (the more likely date), this would mean he was born ca. 453/454 AD, again too early for Jordanes's tale. If Theodoric was born ca. 451/2 AD when the Goths were still ruled by Attila, what are we to make of the weird story in Jordanes of Thiudimer rejoicing at the news of his brother's victory over the sons of Attila and also the birth of his newborn son Theodoric? Another problem with the story is that all sources other than Jordanes makes Theodoric the son not of Thiudimer, but Valamer.⁷⁴

The story is clearly a forged one that deliberately distorts what really took place during and after the Hunnic civil war. Valamer of course did not throw off the Hunnic 'yoke'. He was a Hun after all. Interestingly Priscus, our most reliable source, who usually uses the term Scythian to refer to Huns rather than Goths, also calls Balamer (Valamer) a Scythian,⁷⁵ that is a Hun.⁷⁶ Valamer also certainly did not rebel against Attila's sons directly after the death of Attila, as Jordanes tells us. Pohl and Wolfram are right to point out that the Valamer Goths only parted ways with the sons of Attila after the battle of Nedao in 454 AD.⁷⁷ In fact the definitive break only came after either 459 AD (when Theodoric was sent to Constantinople as a hostage) or 461 AD when Valamer concluded a *foedus* (a form of alliance) with the Romans.⁷⁸

Jordanes, in order to create the impression that Valamer and his brothers immediately broke free from the control of Attila's sons right after the death of Attila in 453 AD, invented a fictitious war between the Huns and the Goths in the mid 450s. The only real war between the Huns under Attila's sons and Valamer's Goths was the war that took place in the mid 460s. So, just as he created two Valamers (one Hunnic, one Gothic) out of the same person, Jordanes also created two wars out of a single conflict which occurred in the 460s.

This extended demonstration of how Jordanes distorted the course

of mid fifth century events in his *Getica*, as well as the Amal genealogy, despite its tediousness, is unfortunately necessary, because otherwise it is impossible to reconstruct the history of the post-Attila Huns. Jordanes records that after Nedao in 454 AD the Huns entered Rome's Balkan territories south of the Danube and seized them without Roman authorization.⁷⁹ Jordanes says that the Ostrogoths, like the Gepids who had formed an alliance with the Romans against the Huns ca. 454 AD, in vivid contrast to the rapacious behaviour of the Huns who simply seized Roman territory illegally, asked for land from the Romans and in a peaceful manner received Pannonia from the emperor Marcian.⁸⁰ Again this is simply not true. Valamer did indeed enter into some kind of a peace agreement with the Eastern Romans during the reign of Marcian, but this had nothing to do with authorization to settle in Pannonia. The Ostrogoths had already been settled there prior to Attila's death by the Huns! Rather what had transpired was an agreement not to invade Roman territory in return for a small monetary compensation.⁸¹ When he was not paid his due 'tribute' Valamer attacked the Romans in 459 AD devastating Illyricum and raiding as far south as Epirus.⁸²

It was only after this initial clash with Constantinople that Valamer's stance towards the Romans changed and he agreed to send his son or nephew Theodoric to Constantinople as a hostage. A more definite *foedus* involving a payment of 300 pounds of gold per year from the Romans to the Goths was agreed to in 461 AD. The partial reassertion of East Roman authority in areas south of the Danube in the late 450s, demonstrated by the absorption of the Hunnic-Gothic fief formally controlled by a Hunnic prince called Tuldila by the Roman around 458AD,⁸³ may explain Valamer's decision to make peace with the Romans and it is probably at this stage that he finally deserted the sons of Attila.

However, the sons of Attila and the eastern Huns with them, who were far from finished, did not quietly tolerate this situation. After Ellac's death in 454 AD the kingship of the main Huns had passed to two other sons of Attila, Ernakh and Dengizich, with Dengizich presumably functioning as the western viceroy of Ernakh, the main Hunnic king. Valamer, having gained Roman support in 461 AD via the *foedus*, seems to have declared himself king of the Huns in defiance of the sons of Attila (hence the reference to Balamber king of the Huns) and sometime in the mid 460s he attacked the Sadages, one of the tribes controlled by Dengizich. Dengizich responded by mobilizing an army of the Ultzinzures, Angisciri, the Bittugures and the Bardores against Valamer and his Ostrogoths.

At this time, the Goths were also facing hostilities from Hunimund, king of the Suebi and the Sciri under the Hun noble Edeco.⁸⁴

Hunimund, presumably a cousin of Valamer and descendant of Hunimund the Great, is said to have disturbed the original peace between Edeco of the Sciri and the Goths of Valamer after a bitter feud with Valamer's brother Thiudimer. To understand this feud we must go back in time to 454 AD when Thorismud, the heir of Hunimund the Great fell in battle against the Gepids at Nedao. After Thorismud's demise kingship was assumed by Valamer who took over his cousin's Goths as well as those under Vinitharius. Hunimund who had inherited the Suebi from Hunimund the Great was probably disgruntled by this succession and in particular displeased by Valamer's distribution of fiefs to his own brothers Thiudimer and Vidimer over the heads of other relatives such as himself who descended directly from Hunimund the Great.

Valamer thus found himself in a precarious situation, under attack from both the Huns under Dengizich and the alliance of Suebi and Sciri under Hunimund and Edeco. Jordanes boasts of a massive Gothic victory, but again as in the cases of Thorismud against the Gepids and Theodorid at Chalons, the king of the Goths, this time Valamer, is killed. Jordanes uses the same *topos* that he employs in his account of Theodorid's death at Chalons: the victorious king being killed in battle due to a nasty fall from his horse. The same thing supposedly happened to the 'victorious' Valamer who was killed when he fell from his horse (*Getica* 53.276). Needless to say, this is all nonsense. The death of the king clearly means defeat in battle.

Jordanes separates Valamer's war against the Sciri (definitely a mid 460s event) with the war against Dengizich's Huns, which he pushes back in time to the 450s. However, it is more than likely that the Sciri were acting in tandem with Dengizich's Huns when they killed Valamer ca. 465/6 AD. Note how in Jordanes' account of both the war against the Huns and the Sciri (*Getica* 52.268; 54.278), on both occasions Valamer is taken by surprise and fights the Huns and Sciri alone in the absence of his brothers. Clearly both accounts are duplicated references to one and the same event. That the Goths were the losers, not victors in this battle is made clear by Jordanes himself. After the usual nonsense about how the Goths even after the death of their king defeated their enemies, he says in *Getica* 54.278, that after Valamer was dead the Goths 'fled' to his brother Thiudimer who then summoned Vidimer, the third brother, to help him.

According to the more sensible Priscus, the Roman emperor Leo had sided with the Sciri in this war, against the advice of his general Aspar, who had advised him to remain neutral. Priscus adds that the Goths and the Sciri after an indecisive first encounter appealed to many, including the Romans, for aid. Despite Leo's orders to assist the Sciri, little if anything seems to have been done by the Roman military

to trouble the Goths.⁸⁵ This fragment of Priscus suggests the strong likelihood that the Hunnic clash with the Goths did not happen before the Goths fought with the Sciri, but after the indecisive encounter between the Goths and Sciri mentioned in Priscus which induced both sides to appeal for aid from their neighbours. In other words, the Goths who had a feud with the Suebi and the Sciri fought an indecisive battle with them and also managed to entangle themselves with the Sadages ca. 465 AD. This caused the Sciri and also the Sadages to invite the Huns to intervene.

What followed was a surprise attack on Valamer by the combined army of Huns and Sciri which resulted in defeat and death for the Gothic king. After Valamer's death a significant portion of Valamer's Goths submitted to Dengizich's Huns, though it is unclear in what meaningful sense Thiudimer and Vidimer, Valamer's brothers, who were positioned further west than Valamer's Goths in modern day Croatia, submitted to Dengizich. In any case we find substantial numbers of Ostrogoths fighting under the Huns in 467 AD. Beremud,⁸⁶ the cousin of Valamer and son of the previous king of the Ostrogoths, Thorismud, is said to have left the Ostrogoths for Gaul at this time because he disliked the rule of the Huns (that is Dengizich's rule) and was ashamed of Gothic subservience to them.⁸⁷ Dengizich and Ernakh, Dengizich's brother and overlord, also seem to have brought about the submission to their authority of the powerful Gepids in Hungary or at the very least reconciliation between themselves and the Gepids. This is made very likely by the fact that whenever subsequently the Gepids found themselves threatened they called for and received assistance from the Attilid Hunnic Bulgars, e.g. the aid given to the Gepids by the Bulgar Huns to ward off Theodoric the Ostrogoth's invasion of Sirmium in 504–5 AD.

BRIEF REUNIFICATION AND FINAL DISSOLUTION OF THE WESTERN HUNNIC REALM

Dengizich, his power now at its height, sent an embassy to Constantinople in 466 AD⁸⁸ demanding some of the rights that his father had enjoyed in the previous reign. This of course indicates that the Huns had secured the Danube region well enough to finally reconsider offensive operations against the Romans.⁸⁹ The Hun Empire did not simply disappear immediately after Attila died, nor even after the death of Ellac at Nedao in 454 AD. In the mid 460s AD Hunnic authority was alive and well in the Danubian region. However, what transpired during Dengizich's war against the Romans, 467–9 AD, led to the final dismantling of the Hunnic Empire in the

west.

Dengizich's enterprise ended in catastrophic failure and his severed head was brought back to Constantinople in 469 AD, quite fittingly perhaps by the Romano-Gothic general Anagast, the son of Arnegisclus who died at the hands of Attila, Dengizich's father, in 447 AD. The disaster was precipitated by several factors. Firstly Dengizich's forces were seriously depleted due to the opposition of his brother Ernakh, his overlord, who opposed the war against the Romans because the Huns were at the time engaged in other wars in the east.⁹⁰ Ernakh was apparently combatting the Saragurs and other Oghuric tribes who had defeated the Hunnic Akatziri earlier in 463 AD. We find the Saraghurs invading Persia to the south around this time, possibly due to resistance encountered in the west from the Huns under Ernakh, which halted their expansion in the west. Thus, during the invasion of 467–8 AD Dengizich was forced to depend inordinately on recently reconquered Ostrogoths and equally unreliable tribe of the Bittugurs.

The unreliability of his troops and the lack of support from Ernakh would prove devastating for Dengizich. The Romans, according to Priscus, somehow managed to corner a group of Goths in Dengizich's army in a 'hollow place' and then foster rebellion among them by sending a Hun by the name of Chelchal, who was in Roman service, to incite them.⁹¹ The revolt of the Goths instigated by this subterfuge, apparently spread and forced Dengizich to withdraw. Shortly after this fiasco he was killed in mysterious circumstances, presumably murdered, and his head was delivered to the Romans.

Dengizich's defeat and his sudden death in 469 AD also allowed the brothers of Valamer to finally break away from the Attilid Huns. It is likely that the Amals probably played a major role in Dengizich's defeat and death by leading the Gothic revolt against him during the campaign against the Romans. This explains why Theodoric, Thiudimer's son (or perhaps Valamer's son), was released and sent back to the Ostrogoths shortly after this event by Constantinople ca. 469 AD.⁹² The alignment of the Bittugurs (one of Dengizich's subject tribes) with the Amal Goths after Dengizich's demise also strengthens the conjecture that it was the revolt of the Amals that caused the ultimate failure of Dengizich's expedition, reminiscent of Uldin's doomed expedition earlier in the century which also was sabotaged by Roman subterfuge and revolt among levied troops.⁹³ The Bittugurs must have collaborated with the Ostrogoths in bringing about the demise of King Dengizich.

The fall of Dengizich after the 467–8 war against the Romans meant that the Ostrogoths were finally free to take independent action against their other enemies in the Danubian region. According to Jordanes, just before Theodoric returned to the Goths from

Constantinople ca. 469 AD in late 468 AD the Ostrogoths launched a daring campaign against the Suebi and their federates the Alamanni, presumably somewhere in Noricum.⁹⁴ We also hear of the Goths in Lower Pannonia (i.e. those of Thiudimer) being hostile to the Rugi of King Flaccitheus in Noricum and plotting to kill the Rugian king in an ambush (*Vita S. Sev* 5). This Gothic belligerence however incited the other tribes in the region to unite against them. A grand alliance of Sciri, Rugi, Suebi and the Gepids seems to have taken the field against the Ostrogoths. The great battle at the river Bolia, which Jordanes places some time around 465 AD immediately after the death of Valamer,⁹⁵ but which almost certainly took place around 470 AD, again ended in defeat for the Ostrogoths. Vidimer, the youngest of the three Valamer brothers, moved his group of Goths first into western Noricum and then into Italy, while Thiudimer fled south into Macedonia. Ostrogothic lands in the Danubian region were shared out among the victors (eastern Noricum to the Rugi, Pannonia to the Gepids, Sciri and Suebi).

A further squabble then seems to have arisen among the victorious tribes over the spoils and this triggered some of them to migrate west. Hunimund, the presumably Hunnic ruler of the Suebi led his tribe into the territory of the Alamanni. Hunimund during his journey into southern Germany attacked the city of Batavis (Passau) in Noricum some time after Vidimer's Goths had passed through Noricum ca. 472 AD. The Torcilingian Huns and Sciri also moved out of the Danubian region and migrated to Italy under Odoacer in 471–2 AD (his force also including some Rugi/Rogi and Heruls). Once in Italy Odoacer and his coalition of Huns and Sciri came across a familiar adversary, Vidimer's Goths.

The Roman poet Sidonius Apollinaris, a contemporary of Vidimer and Thiudimer writing around 476 AD, tells us that Vidimer and his East Goths fled to Gaul from Pannonia because of a conflict with the Huns.⁹⁶ Sidonius talks about how the Ostrogoths, with the support of the Visigothic king Euric (reigned from 466 AD onwards), triumphed over the 'neighbouring (vicinosque)' Huns. These Huns who fought the Ostrogoths and Visigoths close to Gaul, presumably in Italy during the early 470s AD, cannot be any other group than the Torcilingi Huns of Odoacer accompanied by the Sciri, Rugi/Rogi and Heruls. Sidonius calls them the hordes of Scythia and adds that the 'Roman' (i.e. the Western Roman emperor) ca. 476 AD sought salvation from Euric against these hordes of the Scythian clime. The 'Scythians' who are mentioned here are of course the army of Odoacer that took over Italy from the last Western Roman emperor Romulus Augustulus.⁹⁷

The Huns of Odoacer seem to have entered Italy just before Vidimer's Ostrogoths, who were then languishing somewhere in

western Noricum. Around 472 AD we see Odoacer being described as the leader of the barbarian *foederati* in Italy. John of Antioch like Sidonius later refers to them as the ‘Scythians’ of Odoacer. This could either be a generic reference to people from the region of ‘Scythia’, that is the Pontic steppes, or a direct reference to actual Huns, since Roman writer frequently referred to the Huns of the fifth century as Scythians.⁹⁸ Glycerius, the then emperor of the Western Roman Empire, used this ‘Scythian’, Hunnic army of Odoacer to push Vidimer’s invading Goths out of Italy into Gaul. It is in this context that the distressed Ostrogoths were rescued from the ‘neighbouring’ Huns (that is Odoacer’s Torcilingi and others) by Euric’s Visigoths.

Thus, the three post-Attila potentates who emerged out of the Hunnic civil war, Ardaric, Edeco and Valamer, were all Hunnic nobles or princes, not the leaders of ‘national’ Germanic revolts against the Huns. It was these men and the troops that they governed, especially those that derived out of the following of Edeco and Valamer (under their sons Odoacer and Theodoric (possibly nephew) respectively) that eventually ended the Western Roman Empire and heralded the beginning of the so-called ‘Middle Ages’. We will have more to say about the new world that these ex-Hunnic Lords and troops created later, but for now let us turn to the eastern Huns under Ernakh.

TABLE 6.1 Genealogy of the Ostrogothic kings of Italy

Amal Genealogy: (possible figures of Hunnic descent in italics*)

**Berig* (According to Jordanes the non-Amal Gothic king who led the Goths out of Scandinavia, but his name clearly suggests a Turkic etymology. He could have been a Hunnic king who led the Hunnic migration out of Central Asia, whose legend was superimposed on the legend of early Gothic migration from the north)

1. Gapt (a mythical figure/deity added to the Amal genealogy by Cassiodorus or Jordanes, non-historical)
2. **Hulmul* (probably another Hunnic king, his name is etymologically linked to the Hun king Humli of the sagas)
3. Augis (another mythical figure, non-historical)
4. Amal (eponymous ancestor of the Amals, non-historical)
5. **Hisarnis* (the ‘iron-one’, recall the Inner Asian cult of iron)
6. Ostrogotha (eponymous ancestor of the Ostrogoths, non-historical)
7. **Hunuil* (eponymous name, is possibly Hun(u) + il, meaning Hun nation)
8. **Athal* (possibly another Turkic name which has been Gothified, Turkic etymology Adal or Attila are both possible)
9. **Achiulf* (name with wolf suffix, the wolf = turkic sacred animal)
10. **Vultuulf* (possibly the Hun king Uldin, ‘Ult/d the wolf’)

11. Valaravans (inserted into the genealogy by Cassiodorus or Jordanes, not the patrilineal ancestor of Theodoric)
 12. Vinitharius (a fifth century figure inserted into the Amal genealogy, not the patrilineal ancestor of Theodoric)
 13. **Vandalarius* (possibly the son of the Hun king Uldin who defeated the Vandals)
 14. **Valamer* (the same historical figure as Balamber king of the Huns), brother of Thiudimer and Vidimer
 15. **Theodoric the Great* (the first Ostrogothic king of Italy)
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NOTES

- 1 John Malalas 14.10, Jeffreys et al. (1986), 195.
- 2 See Bona (1976), 28 ff., esp. p. 38.
- 3 Todd (1992), 236.
- 4 Wolfram (1988), 258–9.
- 5 *Getica* 50.259.
- 6 Burgess (2001b), 97.
- 7 Maenchen-Helfen (1973), 388; Sinor (1946–7), 29; Schönfeld (1911), 277.
- 8 Maenchen-Helfen (1973), 389. For discussion see Schramm (1969), 148.
- 9 *Getica* 50.266.
- 10 Maenchen-Helfen (1973), 407.
- 11 *Getica* 23.120; Bona (2002), 27.
- 12 *Chron. Pasch.*; Maenchen-Helfen (1973), 407.
- 13 See Maenchen-Helfen (1973), 390–2.
- 14 Harmatta (1970), 58–97.
- 15 Vernadsky (1951), 376.
- 16 *Getica* 38.199, 200.
- 17 Alemany (2000), 112.
- 18 Zieme (2006), 114–127.
- 19 Wolfram (1997), 144.
- 20 Pohl (1980), 290.
- 21 Maenchen-Helfen (1973), 154, discusses this in some detail though he is strongly against the identification of Heithrek with Ardaric.
- 22 Maenchen-Helfen (1973), 152–3.
- 23 Pohl (1980), 261, 295.
- 24 Priscus, fr. 11.2, Blockley (1983), 248.
- 25 Heather (1996), 152.
- 26 *Historia Langobardorum* 1.1.
- 27 *Getica* 46.242; *Getica* 57.291; *Romana* 344.
- 28 Pomponius Mela 1.116.
- 29 Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 6.19.
- 30 Fredegar, *Chron.* 3.2, Murray (2000), 593.
- 31 Pritsak (1968), 163.
- 32 Golden (2006), 97–107; Pritsak (1976a), 27.
- 33 *Rom.*, 344.
- 34 *Getica* 57.291.
- 35 *Getica* 53.272, 50.266. Thompson (1996), 202.
- 36 This variation of his name is given by *Anon. Vales.* 10.45.
- 37 Altheim (1948), 24.

- 38 Reynolds and Lopez (1946), 48.
- 39 Reynolds and Lopez (1946), 44–5.
- 40 Maenchen-Helfen (1973), 400.
- 41 Heather (1996), 115.
- 42 Heather (1991), 9, 18.
- 43 Merrills (2005), 109.
- 44 See Wagner (1998), 403–8, for discussion.
- 45 Wolfram (1988), 31.
- 46 *Getica* 14.79.
- 47 Tekin (1968), 334.
- 48 See Rice (1965), 37–8, Pritsak (1953–4), 23, and Kollautz and Miyakawa (1970), 85.
- 49 Haussig (2000), 277.
- 50 Altheim (1959), 227.
- 51 Golden (2009), 95–6; Sinor (1982), 223–231.
- 52 The name of an early Sarmatian tribe Urgoi is thought by M. Olbrycht to mean ‘wolves’. However, it is difficult to find Sarmatian personal names that denote wolf. We can therefore safely assume that the popularization of the wolf suffix names is a post-Hunnic phenomenon.
- 53 The form Athala is found in Cassiodorus 330, 19, see Schönfeld (1911), 33.
- 54 For this practice see Findley (2005), 45.
- 55 *Getica* 4.25. Maenchen-Helfen (1973), 406. See also Merrills (2005), 118–19 for further discussion on Berig.
- 56 Cassius Dio, *Rom. Hist.* 60.19.1. Christensen (2002), 303. See also Altheim (1959), 226.
- 57 Schönfeld (1911), 250, Heather (1996), 114–5, and Christensen (2002), 146, 154. See also Doerfer (1973), 34.
- 58 See Fine (1983), 25, Browning (1975), 32, and Curta (2006), 56–61. See also Heather (2009), 607. The bulk of the Antes are located in the northern parts of the Ukraine, northwest of the Kutrigur and Utigur Huns, by Procopius, 8.4.9, even in the mid sixth century AD.
- 59 Schramm (1969), 140. The Gothic form is provided by Priscus as Μουϋδίουχοϋς. This was simplified even further into Μούϋδιος, a form found in Theophanes 102, 15, Moravcsik (1958), vol. 2, 194.
- 60 Pritsak (1956), 404–19.
- 61 Schönfeld (1911), 206.
- 62 Schönfeld (1911), 108, 245.
- 63 Maenchen-Helfen (1973), 404.
- 64 Schramm (1969), 146–55.
- 65 *Getica* 48. 252–3.
- 66 Prosper, *Epitoma Chronicon* a. 455, 1353, p. 480; Jordanes, *Getica* 35.180 ff.
- 67 Cassiodorus, *Variae* 9.25.4, p. 291 ff. and 11.1.19, p. 329ff. Wolfram (1988), 31; Christensen (2002), 75.
- 68 Reynolds and Lopez (1946), 49; Altheim (1959), 351.
- 69 *Getica* 48.248.
- 70 *Getica* 24.121–2.
- 71 Wolfram (1988), 257; Merrills (2005), 164.
- 72 *Getica* 52.268–9.
- 73 *Getica* 52.271; Ennodius, *Panegyricus Dictus Clementissimo Regi Theoderico ab Ennodio Dei Famulo*, iii, ed., Vogel, *MGH. AA*, 7 (Berlin, 1885, reprint 1961), 204.
- 74 *Anon. Vales.* 9.42 and 12.58; Malchus, fr. 11,14, Damascius, *Epit. Photiana* 46=Photius, *Bibl.* 242, John of Antioch, fr. 211, 4=c. 95 (Boor), and

Theophanes, *Chron.* 5977.

75 Priscus, fr. 37, Blockley (1983), 340.

76 Schäfer (2014a), 243–56, argues quite forcefully that this Balamer is not Valamer the Ostrogoth, as traditionally thought, but a hypothetical Caucasian Hunnic king with the same name. However, for a variety of reasons that cannot be related here in detail due to confines of space, the traditional identification of this Balamer with Valamer is correct.

77 Pohl (1980), 256; Wolfram (1988) 488.

78 Maenchen-Helfen (1973), 164. See also Priscus, fr. 37, Blockley (1983), 340.

79 *Getica* 50.266.

80 *Getica* 50.264.

81 Priscus, fr. 37, Blockley (1983), 340.

82 Demougeot (1979), 777.

83 Wolfram (1988), 259.

84 Priscus, fr. 45, Blockley (1983), 352.

85 Fr. 45 (*Exc. de Leg. Gent.* 17), Blockley (1983), 352.

86 Beremud was the grandfather of Eutharic, later the son-in-law of Theodoric, the Ostrogothic king.

87 *Getica* 48.251.

88 Maenchen-Helfen (1973), 165.

89 Priscus, fr. 46 (*Exc. de Leg. Gent.* 18), Blockley (1983), 352.

90 Priscus, fr. 46 (*Exc. de Leg. Gent.* 18), Blockley (1983), 352.

91 Priscus, fr. 49 (*Exc. de Leg. Gent.* 21), Blockley (1983), 356–8.

92 Schutz (2000), 72.

93 Agathias, *The Histories* 2.13.3, Frendo (1975), 45–6.

94 *Getica* 55.280–81. See also Sidonius Appollinaris, *Carmen* 2, 377.

95 *Getica* 54.277–9, 55.282.

96 Sidonius Apollinaris, *Epistulae* 8.9.5 vv. 36–8.

97 Sidonius, *Epistulae* 8.9.5 vv. 39–42.

98 John of Antioch, fr. 209, 1.

7 THE HUNS OF THE PONTIC STEPPES: THE UTIGUR-KUTRIGUR 'BULGAR' HUNS

THE OGHURS

Between the death of Attila the Hun in 453 AD and the re-emergence of political unity in the eastern half of the Hunnic Empire in the late 460s–early 470s AD, over a period of some 20 years the empire of the Huns was shaken by upheavals, caused mainly by the arrival of new Inner Asian peoples in Europe. These new arrivals were mostly called 'Oghurs' (meaning 'tribe' in Oghuric Turkic). In previous chapters we have already mentioned the conflict between the Rouran Khaganate and Hunnic remnants (such as the Yueban (the weak) Xiongnu) in Central Asia. Around 434 AD the Rouran Khaganate, based in Mongolia, possibly together with the 'Var' people under the Hephthalites, initiated their great push westwards. This pressure in some way seems to have contributed to the replacement of the old Kidarite Hunnic dynasty in the White Hun Empire (southern Central Asia) with the new Hephthalite dynasty.¹

In northern Central Asia (modern Kazakhstan) the Yueban (weak Xiongnu) Huns came under intense pressure from the Rouran, as did elements of the recently formed Tiele Turkic federation of tribes, the so-called Oghurs, some of whom must have been in earlier stages members of the Hunnic confederation in Central Asia. The Sabirs (the eastern neighbours of these Oghurs), who may have been a westerly tribe of the once powerful Xianbei (in Early Middle Chinese pronounced Sārbi or Sārvi),² the old nemesis of the Huns, were likewise defeated by the Rouran (possibly Avars) and in turn applied pressure on the various Oghurs. Priscus tells us that the defeated Oghur groups fought their way into the western steppes dominated by the European Huns.³ In 463 AD the Saragurs (possibly meaning the 'White Oghurs', since white means west in the steppe, western Oghurs)⁴ overwhelmed the Akatziri Huns formerly ruled by Ellac, the son of Attila who had fallen at Nedao in 454 AD.

The assault by the Saragurs and other Oghurs on the Akatziri Huns

must have been a long drawn out process and probably began some time in the 450s AD. Therefore, just after the battle of Nedao, the eastern faction in the Hunnic civil war was prevented from taking the offensive again against Ardaric's western faction because they became engaged in an existential struggle against more powerful invaders from the east. The inability of the militarily more formidable Huns in the Pontic steppe region to crush the secessionist movement among the militarily inferior western tribes in the decades following Nedao becomes intelligible when one considers these geopolitical developments that threatened the eastern flank of these Turkic Huns.

The task of salvaging what was left of the eastern half of the Hunnic Empire fell on Ernakh, the youngest of Attila's sons. Priscus records that Ernakh received preferential treatment from Attila because supposedly there was a prophecy to the effect that Attila's race would fall after Attila's death, but would be restored by Ernakh.⁵ This story in Priscus may actually have been coloured by hindsight, since Priscus was aware of Ernakh's successes in the decades following Nedao. Ernakh apparently became the founding ruler of the so-called 'Bulgar' Huns (that is according to the Bulgar Prince list),⁶ the confederation of Huns and the various Oghurs subdued by Ernakh.⁷ This unification was made easier it seems by the fact that the Huns themselves were largely an Oghuric Turkic speaking people. The Oghur tribes that flooded into the Ukraine and southern Russia to avoid Rouran (Avars?) and Sabir (Xianbei?) domination were in all likelihood formerly constituent members of the Hunnic confederacy/state (possibly that of the Yueban Huns) in Central Asia that had fragmented under Rouran pressure.

The new Oghur arrivals, however, made a lasting impact on the nature of the Hunnic state that emerged in the late fifth century AD. As Golden astutely points out, the names of the two wings of this reconfigured Hunnic state: Kutrigur (9 Oghurs) Huns in the west and the Utigur (30 Oghurs) Huns in the east, both contain the element Oghur in their political designation.⁸ That these two wings were the constituent parts of the same Hunnic state and not originally separate political groups, is confirmed by the records in Procopius and Menander that they had the same Hunnic origin. The foundation legend of these two wings is told by Procopius, who states that before the formation of both entities power in the steppe was concentrated in the hands of a single ruler (undoubtedly Ernakh, son of Attila). This ruler then divided the power/empire between his two sons called Utigur and Kutrigur (probably representative titles given to the two princes who headed these confederations or eponymous names later attributed to them). The peoples allocated to the two sons were then called Utigurs and Kutrigurs, with the Utigurs clearly possessing

precedence in the typical Inner Asian manner, being mentioned first and occupying the senior position to the east of the confederacy/state, (Procopius 8. 5.1–4). This story in Procopius is clearly an allusion to real historical processes, which took place in the late fifth century AD when Ernakh reunited the Pontic steppe and then in the usual Inner Asian manner divided his realm into two wings. Procopius goes on to locate the Utigurs in the Kuban steppe (southwestern Russia) and the Kutrigurs in ‘the greater part of the plains’ west of the Sea of Azov, i.e. southern Ukraine (8.5.22–3).

Menander Protector, our other source, for his part in his record of Justinian’s diplomatic efforts to trigger a civil war between the Kutrigurs and Utigurs, reports that Sandilkh the king of the Utigurs replied to Justinian that it would be ‘unholy’ and altogether improper to destroy one’s own fellow tribesmen. Sandilkh calls the Kutrigurs his kin, confirming the common origins of the two groups.⁹ These two wings and another related group the Onogurs were also called Bulgars in our sources, indicating that ‘Bulgar’ was either an alternative name for these Huns or their new ethnic self-designation in addition to the political name ‘Hun’. Henceforth they were known collectively as Bulgar Huns. The terms Utigur, Kutrigur and Onogur were not ethnic designations, but terms signifying the socio-military organization of steppe peoples, 30, 9 and 10 oghurs (tribes/units).

That the name Hun used alongside the names Utigur, Kutrigur, Bulgar and Onogur in our sixth century AD sources is not simply an anachronism or a generic term for nomad is shown by the fact that Procopius, Agathias and Menander all call the Utigurs and Kutrigurs Huns, but hardly ever in a generic sense. The name Hun is almost always used to designate a distinct grouping of tribes. For instance, the Eastern Roman emperor Justin, when replying to the Avar ambassador Targites, is reported to have declared that he would not pay the tribute Justinian had earlier paid to the Huns, now to the Avars. The Kutrigurs and Utigurs are then mentioned by name.¹⁰ This clearly indicates firstly that the Utigurs and Kutrigurs were Huns and secondly that both the Avars and the Romans regarded the contemporary Kutrigurs and Utigurs to be Huns not in an anachronistic sense, but in reality. That the Avars and Huns, both steppe peoples, are mentioned as distinct groups also shows that Menander is here not using the name Hun in a generic sense for nomad (that would only really begin with Theophylact Simocatta in the seventh century who calls both the Avars and the Turks Huns).

A letter from the Eastern Roman emperor Justinian to the Utigur Hunnic king Sandilkh shows that the Romans expected the eastern Hunnic king, in the traditional steppe manner that assigned supreme power to the eastern wing of the political entity, to have the ability to

restrain the western wing under King Zabergan of the Kutrigurs. Thus gifts to the Huns were sent only to the Utigurs,¹¹ which ended up offending the Kutrigurs. In the letter Justinian incites the Utigurs to punish the Kutrigurs for invading Roman territory without the authorization of their Utigur overlords. He insinuates that the Kutrigurs had attacked the Romans to demonstrate that they were superior to the Utigurs. This apparently angered Sandilkh, who having learned of the Kutrigur expedition against the Romans wished, according to Agathias, to punish the Kutrigurs for their insolence.¹² Roman subterfuge thus brought on a civil war among the Huns in the middle of the sixth century AD, ending the political stability and unity achieved by Ernakh's wars of unification in the second half of the preceding fifth century AD.

Thus the eastern half of the Hunnic Empire was still alive and well nearly 100 years after the death of Attila, firmly contradicting thereby the erroneous assumption that the Hunnic Empire simply disintegrated without leaving a trace and the Huns just vanished thereafter. The Huns of the east, as mentioned above, acquired a new name, Bulgar (which in Turkic means 'stir, confuse or mix'),¹³ which probably refers to the process of tribal union and the mixing of the new Oghurs (tribes) and the original Huns under the Attilids.¹⁴ Once the unification was complete, the Huns again emerged to threaten the Romans.

THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE BULGAR HUNS, THE CAUCASIAN HUNS AND THE AVARS

The new Bulgar Huns begin to appear in historical records in the late fifth century AD when the Eastern Roman emperor Zeno appeals to them for aid against the Ostrogoths in 480 AD. Sensing Eastern Roman weakness the Huns would raid the Balkan territories of the Eastern Roman Empire repeatedly in 491, 493, 499, 502 AD. The Bulgar Hunnic raid in 499 AD inflicted a particularly embarrassing defeat on the Romans who lost more than 4,000 men and four military counts. Six years later in 505 AD the Bulgar Huns are however seen in alliance with the Romans against the Ostrogoths and their ally Mundo, the Gepid grandson of Attila the Hun.¹⁵ The Huns had not disappeared at all, but continued to be a major political actor in eastern and southeastern Europe.

In 514 AD the Roman usurper Vitalian, who is called a Scythian by our sources (so he was possibly a Hun, Alan or an eastern Goth in origin),¹⁶ appealed to the Bulgar Huns for aid against the legitimate emperor Anastasius.¹⁷ In the following year in 515 AD on the other

side of the Black Sea the Caucasian Huns (a group independent of the Attilid Bulgar Huns in the Ukraine and southern Russia) raided Armenia, Cappadocia and Lycaonia. The power of the Huns had hardly receded. The threat from them was so great that the emperor Justinian in 531 AD had to specifically appoint a certain Chilbudius as general of Thrace to guard the river Danube against repeated incursion by the Huns, who, according to Procopius, along with new tribal groups such as the Antes and Sclaveni (early Slavs), had 'done irreparable harm to the Romans'.¹⁸

These precautions would have little effect however. The Romans faced an invasion of Kutrigur Huns in Moesia and Illyricum in 538/9 AD and by 540 AD Hunnic armies were seen near Constantinople and also Thessaly (central Greece). Procopius records that the Huns had invaded the empire frequently before this, but never had the calamity for the Romans been so great. In 539 AD the Huns captured 32 fortresses in Illyricum alone, allegedly taking 120,000 captives.¹⁹ Two decades later Zabergan and his Kutrigur Bulgar Huns in 558 AD would actually threaten the very existence of the Roman Empire by a devastating invasion of the Balkans, which brought Hunnic arms all the way to the long Walls of Constantinople.²⁰ In the western Balkans the Bulgar Huns would penetrate as far south as the Isthmus of Corinth.

The activities of the Caucasian Huns in the sixth century AD also deserve mention at this point. These Huns were separated from the rest of the Huns due to the establishment of the Sabir realm ca. 506 AD in the Volga region. While co-existing with both the Sabirs to the north and the Greater Hunnic state of the Attilids to the west in the Kuban steppe and southern Ukraine, these Caucasian Huns would found a smaller kingdom in what is now modern Dagestan.²¹ Despite the small size of their state the military prowess of these Caucasian Huns was noted by both the Eastern Romans and the Sassanian Persians. In 503 AD the invasion of these Huns into northern Persia forced Kabad, the Sassanian king, to prematurely end his successful campaign against the Romans.²²

An East Roman ambassador, by the name of Probus, was then presumably sent to the Utigurs to win over with bribes an Attilid Hunnic army to aid Constantinople's Caucasian allies struggling against the Persians. The Utigurs, however, refused to be bought and the East Romans instead hired some mercenaries from the Caucasian Huns who were sent to Lazica (western Georgia) under a certain Peter to aid the Iberian king Gourgenes.²³ Later in 522 AD Boareks, the widow of King Balach, called a Hun by Malalas,²⁴ but most likely a Sabir,²⁵ attacked two Hunnic leaders in succession, King Styrax in 528 AD and then later King Glones, on behalf of the Romans. These two

kings attacked by Boareks were apparently allies of the Sassanians.

The Huns during this time also provided the Eastern Romans with some of their best soldiers. A Caucasian Hunnic sub-king called Askoum entered Roman service in 530 AD and was appointed *magister militum per Illyricum*. At the great battle of Daras, the Roman general Belisarius defeated the larger Sassanian Persian army mainly through the battle prowess of his 600 Massagetic (i.e. Hunnic) horsemen under the Huns Sunicas and Aigan. A further 600 horsemen under the Hunnic commanders Simmas and Ascan also performed brilliantly against the Persians.²⁶

These allied Hunnic mounted archers under the overall command of Aigan (by birth a Hun) and led by Sinnion and Balas, 600 in all, despite their small numbers would again play a decisive role in the Eastern Roman re-conquest of North Africa from the Vandals.²⁷ According to Procopius the Huns were reluctant to adhere to Roman military discipline, because they were allies of the Romans and refused to be treated as subjects.²⁸ The Vandals under King Gelimer sensing Hunnic discontent tried to win them over and Belisarius, the Roman commander, was forced to resort to gifts, banquets and 'every other manner of flattering attention every day' in order to prevent the Huns from going over to the Vandals. Such was their importance to victory or defeat of Roman arms.

The Hunnic cavalry was so potent that Althias, a Hunnic commander in Roman service, would later defeat the army of Iaudas, king of the Moors, with a force of just 70 Huns.²⁹ The Roman army and especially the Roman cavalry in the sixth and seventh centuries AD actually copied wholesale the model of fifth century and contemporary Hunnic mobile armies, but nothing could equal the real Huns. Two-hundred Hunnic allies would again participate in Belisarius' conquest of Italy from the Ostrogoths (530s AD) and in the process earn a formidable reputation.³⁰ Incidentally Mundo, the grandson of Attila, who had by this stage switched over to Roman service, would command the other wing of the Roman advance against the Ostrogoths.³¹ The Huns would later form an important part of the great army with which the Roman general Narses defeated and killed the Ostrogothic king Totila.³²

Victory or defeat in Rome's wars in the east also similarly depended on the decision and mood of Hunnic mercenaries and allies. For instance in 531 AD the Eastern Roman emperor Justinian got hold of intelligence through a spy who had defected from the Persians that the Huns had decided to ally with the Persians and were marching into Roman territory to join up with the invading Persian host. This incredibly dangerous state of affairs however was turned to Rome's advantage by a clever ruse. Justinian managed to trick the Persians

then besieging Martyropolis into believing that these Huns had been won over by bribes from the Roman emperor. The Persians were terrified by the advance of these 'hostile' Huns and simply withdrew,³³ demonstrating thereby the awe with which both the Romans and Persians held the military power of the Huns.

The Caucasian Huns, despite the small size of their polity, would persist for centuries. Within the Khazar Khaganate (seventh–eleventh centuries AD), which dominated the Pontic steppe after the demise of the Huns, there were seven hereditary kingdoms. One of these kingdoms was a Hunnic kingdom located in the basin of the Sulak river to the north of the city of Derbent, no doubt the continuation of the old Caucasian Hunnic state.

Returning to the Attilid Huns, the geography of the Pontic steppe region in the middle of the sixth century gives us some more tantalizing clues about the administration of this Attilid Hunnic state. According to Jordanes (*Getica* 5.36–37), the steppes north of the Black Sea was settled by the following groups: the Akatziri (Huns situated somewhere northwest of the Bulgars); the Bulgar (the Attilid ruled Kutrigur and Utigur Huns between the Dnieper and the Volga);³⁴ the Hunni (as the name indicates tribes with Hunnic origins) who were divided into the so-called Altziagiri near Cherson in the Crimea and the Sabirs (in the Volga basin area, erroneously called Huns); lastly the Hunuguri (the Onogurs living to the northwest of the Sabirs in the middle Volga region, who seem to have controlled the trade in marten skins with the Ural region).³⁵

Another source, Pseudo-Zacharias Rhetor, gives us slightly more names, a total of 13 nomadic tribes around 555 AD: Onoghurs, Ogurs, Sabirs, Bulgars, Kutrigurs, Avars, Acatziri, Itimari, Saragurs, Barselts, Choliatae, Abdelae (Hephtalites) and Hephtalites.³⁶ The Hephtalites, whose name is duplicated in this list as both Abdelae ('bdl) and Hephtalites ('ptlyt),³⁷ as a result of some confusion, were at this time situated in Central Asia. The Avars and the Choliatae were new arrivals in the 550s AD. This leaves us with nine instead of five or six tribes given by Jordanes. However, pseudo-Zacharias was to an extent indulging in anachronisms. He appears to have simply named all the tribes that were historically known to the East Romans up to that point, rather than carefully show the contemporary political situation in the steppe zone.³⁸ It is almost certain that the Itimari and Saragurs were gone by 555 AD. The 'Ogurs' could mean simply Turkish speaking tribes in the region or might refer to the Utigurs who are otherwise not mentioned, whereas Kutrigurs are. Obviously the 'Bulgars' are Kutrigurs and Utigurs, their names have been duplicated.

These alternative names, anachronisms and duplications in our lists have confused many historians into believing that there was political

anarchy in the Pontic steppes during the sixth century AD. However, a careful analysis of the information preserved in these lists show that there were four groups in the Pontic steppe with ties to the house of Attila: Kutrigur, Utigur, Onogur and Akatziri. These four may have constituted the four main divisions of the steppe confederation, with the Utigurs and Kutrigurs forming the main two wings and the Akatziri and Onogurs functioning as their subsidiary hordes just as in the old Xiongnu state which was divided into two wings, each with a lesser sub-division. This fact seems to be confirmed by the information in Jordanes (*Getica* 5.37), that the Hunuguri (Onogurs) were inferior to their more powerful neighbours.

The Barselts, who are mentioned in the second list only, were a minor group that was situated in the Volga region. They and the Sabirs, likewise situated in the Volga region, were independent of the Attilids. The Altziagiri in the Crimea are likely to have been either a small vassal horde owing allegiance to the Attilid Huns or simply a corruption of the Hunnic term Alt/Ult-zin-cur, a reference to the title borne by the aristocratic lords of the Hunnic supreme council of the six lords. Thus, the Huns in the Pontic steppe continued to reign over Eastern Europe well after the western half of their empire had fragmented following the deaths of Attila and Dengizich.

This Attilid Hunnic state, as we have seen earlier, was cast into murderous civil war by the subterfuge of the Roman emperor Justinian in the middle of the sixth century AD. The disunity among the Bulgar Huns that resulted from this civil strife would prove decisive when the Avars appeared in the Pontic steppes. In 557 AD, after receiving the submission of the Sabirs, Onogurs and Barsils³⁹ (the inhabitants of the Volga region), the Avar Khaganate rapidly swallowed up the feuding Bulgar Huns. The empire that was built on these Avar conquests soon brought about the revival of the old Hunnic Empire of Attila in its entirety. The Avars who were only 20,000 in number rapidly adopted the language of the more numerous Turkic Huns and came to speak the same language as the Huns.⁴⁰ Essentially what had happened was not the end of the Hunnic state, but a new royal clan (Avar) being superimposed on the old royal house of Attila (which now became merely the rulers of vassal Bulgars under Avar overlordship). We have already seen earlier in the book a similar phenomenon, the imposition of Western Turk rulers on the conquered Hephthalite Huns in Central Asia, which also happened in the mid sixth century AD.

The Avars who in any case had a powerful Hunnic element within their confederation already before entering Europe, as their ethnonym Var-Hun shows, in just ten years recovered all of the former Hunnic lands in Central Europe. In 565/566 AD they defeated and captured

the Frankish king Sigibert.⁴¹ In 567 AD they went on to destroy the Gepids and in 568 AD they took over Austria from the departing Lombards.⁴² In that same year 10,000 Kutrigur Bulgar Huns under the command of the Avar Khagan Bayan, headed south to sack the various cities of Dalmatia. By the end of the sixth century the Avar-Hun Empire had conquered most of Rome's Balkan territories as far south as Athens, Corinth and the Peloponnese (southern Greece). In 584 AD the East Romans were forced to pay a tribute of 80,000 *solidi* (Theophylact 1.6.6) and an Avar ruling elite would linger on in areas such as Greece until 805–6 AD.⁴³ Avar conquest also subdued the Slavs of Eastern Europe and all the Slavs up to the Baltic Sea region were placed under the Avar yoke.

Avars and their Bulgar Hun subjects went one step further and carried out what even the Huns of Attila had not attempted, laying siege to the great fortress of Constantinople itself in 626 AD. In this effort they were in alliance with the Sassanian Persians. The attack almost succeeded in destroying the Roman Empire for good. However, Rome's final destruction would have to wait another 800 years when another Turkic people stormed the walls of Constantinople in 1453. After the great siege failed, the Attilids who had been humiliated by the Avars into submission earlier in the mid sixth century AD, rose up to reclaim their position as Khagans/emperors of the western steppes.⁴⁴

After a bloody civil war the mighty empire of the Avar Khagans was split into two halves, just like the old empire of the Huns. Hungary and other parts of Central Europe remained in the hands of the Avars, while the Pontic steppe (the Ukraine and parts of southern Russia) became Great Bulgaria under the leadership of the Onogur Bulgars ruled by Khan Kubrat.⁴⁵ He is referred to in Theophanes, as the king of the Ounnogoundour Huns-Bulgars⁴⁶ and of the Kotragoi.⁴⁷ Great Bulgaria however would fall to the Turkic Khazars within a generation in the middle of the seventh century AD and two splinter groups from the main Bulgar Huns would establish two long-lasting medieval states: Volga Bulgaria (centred around the modern Republic of Tatarstan in Russia) and Danubian Bulgaria (modern Bulgaria and parts of Greece, Serbia and Romania).

In the 790s AD the Avar Khaganate in Hungary and Austria was dismantled by the combined pressure exerted on it by the Danubian Bulgars and the Franks.⁴⁸ The remnants of their once mighty empire would join the Hungarians when they arrived in the Carpathian basin under the Arpad dynasty in 896 AD.⁴⁹ The Hungarians, whose name possibly derives from the tribal name of the Onogurs⁵⁰ and who were possibly linked to the Attilid Bulgar Huns, claimed Attila as the ancestor of their founder Arpad.⁵¹ Attila's Hunnic legacy and the

achievements of the Huns would be cherished in Hungary, even while in the rest of Europe the Huns were being demonized as the incarnation of evil and savagery. Bulgaria, another powerful medieval state with Hunnic ties, would dominate much of the Balkans until it was destroyed by the old enemies of the Huns, the Eastern Romans in the early eleventh century under the formidable Basil II, styled the Bulgar-Slayer.⁵²

NOTES

- 1 Kollautz and Miyakawa (1970), 113; Golden (1992), 78; Christian (1998), 237.
- 2 Pritsak (1976b), 28–9; Pulleyblank (2000b), 71.
- 3 Priscus, fr. 30.
- 4 Kollautz and Miyakawa (1970), 141, identify the Sar- prefix as etymologically linked to sary = white (Turkish). See also Golden (2006–7), 37.
- 5 Priscus, fr. 13.3, Blockley (1983), 288.
- 6 See Golden (1990), 257; Kollautz and Miyakawa (1970), 157; Sinor (1990a), 199; Altheim (1948), 15, 21; Gyuzelev (1979), 11.
- 7 Bell-Fialkoff (2000), 229; Golden (1990), 257. Clauson (1962), 39.
- 8 Golden (1992), 99.
- 9 Procopius, 8.5.21–2; Menander, Blockley (1985), 42–4.
- 10 Menander, fr. 12.6, Blockley (1985), 138–40.
- 11 Agathias 5.12.6–7, Frendo (1975), 147.
- 12 Agathias 5.24–25, Frendo (1975), 160–2.
- 13 Golden (1992), 104.
- 14 Golden (1992), 103.
- 15 Marcellinus Comes, Croke (1995), 32–3; Golden (2000), 288; Browning (1975), 29; Croke (1980), 189–90; Collins (2000), 127.
- 16 Marcellinus Comes, Croke (1995), 37–8.
- 17 Malalas 16.16, Jeffreys et al. (1986), 226.
- 18 Procopius, 7.14.1–2.
- 19 Procopius, 2. 4.4–11.
- 20 Golden (1992), 100; Whitby (2000c), 715.
- 21 Procopius, 8.3.5.
- 22 Procopius, 1.8.19.
- 23 Procopius, 1.12.1–9.
- 24 Malalas 18.13, Jeffreys et al. (1986), 249–50; Theophanes AM 6020, Mango and Scott (1997), 266–7.
- 25 Golden (1992), 106.
- 26 Procopius, 1.14.39–50.
- 27 Procopius, 3.11.11–12; 18.12–19.
- 28 Procopius, 3.12. 8–10, 4.1.5–11; 4.3.7–16
- 29 Procopius, 4.13.1–17; Greatrex (2000), 268.
- 30 Procopius, 5.5.4, 6.1.1–10, 7.30. 6
- 31 Procopius, 5.5.11 ff., 5.7.1–8.
- 32 Procopius, 8.26.
- 33 Procopius, 1.21.11–16, 27–8.
- 34 It is significant that Jordanes mentions the Bulgars and then does not bother to mention the Kutrigurs and Utigurs. To him they were clearly one and the same.

- 35 *Getica*, 5.36–7.
- 36 Marquart (1903), 365, n. 1. See also Alemany (2000), 394; Czeglédy (1971), 137.
- 37 Czeglédy (1971), 143.
- 38 Czeglédy (1971), 142.
- 39 Golden (1992), 109.
- 40 Menander, fr. 27.2, Blockley (1985), 239; Golden (1992), 110.
- 41 Golden (1992), 111, and Szádeczky-Kardoss (1990), 207.
- 42 Christie (1995), 58 ff.
- 43 Pohl (1988), 58–89; Szádeczky-Kardoss (1990), 208–9, 215.
- 44 See Chronicle of Fredegar Book 4.72, Wallace-Hadrill (1960), 60–1.
- 45 Curta (2006), 76–9. For a detailed history of the Ogurs, Onogurs and the Bulgars see Golden (2000), 286–9.
- 46 Agathias calls them Onogur Huns (3.5.6, Frendo (1975), 72).
- 47 Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1883, reprint, Stuttgart, 1972), 1, 357; AM 6171, Mango and Scott (1997), 497.
- 48 Szádeczky-Kardoss (1990), 217–20. See also Curta (2006), 94.
- 49 Fine (1983), 78. See also Kristó (2000), 370–2.
- 50 See Németh (1930), 178–82; Pritsak (1976b), 21.
- 51 Pohl (1997), 69.
- 52 Curta (2006), 243–7.

8 THE LEGACY OF THE HUNS

It is often thought that the Huns caused a lot of destruction and mayhem and then simply vanished without leaving a trace. Their legacy, if mentioned at all, was thought to be confined to the pages of history that speak of plundering and wanton destruction by a barbarous people. Nothing substantial came from the Huns, it was argued. In short, there was no Hunnic legacy, according to this traditional view.

Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. The legacy of the Huns was as significant and long-lasting as that of the Romans and arguably its impact equally as great on the history of Europe and Asia that followed. We have already briefly discussed the tremendous impact that the Huns of Asia had on the subsequent history of China, Iran and India. This chapter will outline the ways in which the Huns of Europe changed both Europe and the world.

REDRAWING THE POLITICAL MAP OF EUROPE

The first very obvious impact the Huns had on later European history is their reshaping of the political configuration of Europe. The most significant of these political changes brought about by the Huns was the destruction of the Western Roman Empire and the establishment of the first 'barbarian' kingdom of Italy, ruled by the Torcilingi Huns under Odoacer and then by the Hunnic-Gothic dynasty of the 'Amals'. Many historians have argued that the Huns had no important role to play in the destruction of the Western Roman state. That is a huge under-estimation.

As noted earlier, the last Western Roman emperor Romulus Augustulus was overthrown by the Hunnic prince Odoacer of the Torcilingi Huns, Rogi and the Sciri. It was Odoacer who delivered the coup-de-grâce on the dying Roman Empire in the west. But how did this cataclysmic event happen? To understand what happened, it is necessary to consider the person of Orestes, the personal secretary of Attila the Hun,¹ who was the father of Romulus Augustulus. His Greek-sounding name has made most historians assume, probably correctly, that he was someone from within the Roman Empire, but

the name of his father recorded in Priscus, Tatoulos, is probably not Roman (Greek or Latin) in origin.² He was therefore in all likelihood of mixed ancestry.

After the death of Attila, Orestes gradually drifted back into Roman orbit and later managed to replace Gundobad the Burgundian in 473 AD as *magister militum* of Western Roman armies and then finally elevate his son to the position of emperor in 475 AD. He achieved this by securing the support of the 'barbarian' troops, then making up most of the so-called 'Roman' army in Italy. We have already mentioned briefly above that most of these 'barbarian' troops in Italy were the 'Scythians' of Odoacer, the Torcilingian Huns, Rogi, Sciri and the Heruls, all originating from the Hunnic Empire. How this confederation of tribes from the Hunnic Empire came to militarily dominate what was left of the Western Roman Empire is explained differently by our various sources.

Jordanes (*Getica* 46.242; *Romana* 344) in the sixth century describes Odoacer as the king of an independent barbarian army, who invaded Italy and overthrew Orestes, a conventional conquest in other words. Later John of Antioch (fr. 209 (1)) in the seventh century noted that Odoacer the son of Edeco was together with the barbarian strongman and king-maker Ricimer when the latter overthrew the Western Roman emperor Anthemius in 472 AD. Procopius, however, confusingly describes Odoacer as one of the emperor's bodyguards (5.1.6). This has led some historians to argue that what happened in 476 AD was not an invasion of barbarians as Jordanes would have it, but essentially a coup d'état inside the Roman Empire by disgruntled Roman soldiers. Given the composition of this so-called 'Roman' army, however, which was almost entirely made up of tribes originating from the Hunnic Empire and all of them tribes deeply associated with Odoacer (e.g. he was personally the king of the Torcilingi and by birth a Rogian, the Sciri are his mother's people and the Heruls were allies of the Sciri under Edeco in the Danubian region), it is impossible to treat the overthrow of Orestes and Romulus as an internal 'Roman' affair. Even Orestes was after all the secretary of Attila the Hun.

It is likely that both versions of Odoacer's arrival in Italy, one as the king of a conquering barbarian army and the other as an officer in the Roman army, are correct to an extent, but they each view Odoacer from different perspectives. Jordanes saw him from the perspective of the 'barbarians' and John and Procopius from that of the 'Romans'. As mentioned above the fact that Odoacer was not a mere officer in the Roman army is made clear by the ethnic composition of the army that overthrew Orestes. The reason that Odoacer plays such a prominent role already in 472 AD in the overthrow of Anthemius alongside Ricimer is that a significant portion of the 'Roman' army of Italy was

already controlled by him and this gave him the power to interfere with Roman internal politics.

Odoacer probably first entered Italy during the reign of Anthemius (467–72 AD) with an army that he had gathered in Pannonia and Noricum, perhaps at the invitation of Anthemius himself who may have wished to check the power of Ricimer's 'Roman' army within Italy by bringing in a new barbarian army. This may have been interpreted by Procopius as Odoacer becoming the emperor's 'bodyguard'. However, he was clearly no ordinary 'bodyguard'. As soon as he arrived, instead of guarding the emperor, Odoacer seems to have colluded with Ricimer in a coup (John of Antioch's account). As we have seen earlier, he then played a critical role in defeating the invading army of Vidimer's Goths during the later reign of Glycerius (473–4 AD).

Odoacer then fell out with Gundobad, Ricimer's nephew and successor, whom he seems to have expelled from Italy in 473 AD. The king of the Torcilingi then had the hapless emperor Glycerius replaced with Nepos, the Eastern Roman candidate, in 474 AD and then in the following year replaced Nepos with Romulus at the instigation of Orestes, his long-time acquaintance at the court of Attila the Hun. The Hunnic connection made Orestes and his son Romulus ideal candidates for the former Hunnic troops and their leader Odoacer to use as figureheads. Orestes made lavish promises, but when he failed to live up to his side of the bargain, the game was up.³ Odoacer swiftly executed Orestes and then established himself as king of Italy. Thus, the Roman Empire in the west was definitively ended as a political entity by former Hunnic troops governed by a prince of Hunnic origin, Odoacer. Marcellinus Comes declared that the Roman Empire in the west perished with the deposition of Romulus by Odoacer.⁴

Odoacer's control over Italy turned out to be brief and he was overthrown by another prince with Hunnic ancestry, Theodoric king of the Ostrogoths. The Ostrogoths and the Lombards, who eventually became the rulers of post-Roman Italy, were both however like the confederacy led by Odoacer, also political units formed out of the former Hunnic Empire. There can therefore be no doubt that the end of the Western Roman Empire was brought about by the Huns.

The notion that the Hunnic-Germanic princes Odoacer and Theodoric ruled Italy as mere regents of the Eastern Roman emperor and therefore the new Italy was still Roman and the overthrow of Romulus by Odoacer was insignificant is clearly incorrect. The two 'barbarian' kings were independent monarchs of a new political entity. Cassiodorus in the *Variae* uses imperial vocabulary to refer to the Ostrogothic kingdom, calling it an *imperium* of Theodoric (1.42) and

repeatedly uses the phrase *imperium italiae*.⁵ This is no doubt a reflection of the understanding of Theodoric himself who considered his realm an *imperium* separate from the Roman Empire of the east and similar, but different from the Western Roman Empire that had preceded it.

Both Theodoric and Odoacer before him occasionally adopted a subservient pose to ward off Eastern Roman intervention in western affairs, but they saw themselves as rulers of independent kingdoms. This is confirmed by the fact that Odoacer appointed his son Thela as Caesar without any authorization from Constantinople. Clovis the Frank (whose Frankish kingdom we will discuss shortly), who was geographically more distant from Constantinople and had literally nothing to fear from the East Romans, was more brazen in his imperial pretensions than even Odoacer. He allowed his followers to hail him as an Augustus in 507 AD and minted coins with his own name and image in place of the emperor.⁶

Despite all the rhetoric of respecting the Eastern Roman emperor and Roman imperial traditions the two kings of 'barbarian' Italy, like Clovis in Gaul, reigned as independent rulers in practice, but at the same time they also wished and needed to be recognized by the native Romans as legitimate rulers. This was partly due to the ever-present fear of eventual re-conquest by the Eastern Roman Empire (something which Clovis did not need to fear due to the luxury of distance). We have in fact already seen earlier in the book a very similar situation in China after the Xiongnu Hun and Xianbei conquests of that civilization in the fourth century AD. Xiongnu, Xianbei and other non-Chinese rulers adopted Chinese titles, surnames and state names, employed Chinese bureaucrats and paid lip-service to respecting Chinese imperial traditions and *mores*. These measures were obviously designed to placate the conquered native population and to give the Chinese the false impression that nothing much had changed. Some of these 'barbarian' kingdoms of northern China at times even professed allegiance to the 'legitimate' Chinese Empire of the Eastern Jin to the south when it was politically and militarily expedient to do so, while at the same time zealously safe-guarding their independence.

We should interpret the behaviour of both Odoacer and Theodoric in the same way, since they, like their Inner Asian counterparts in China, were faced with very similar constraints and problems. Both kings showed a willingness to abide by, at least outwardly, established Roman precedents. So, Theodoric accepted the 'commission' from the Eastern Roman emperor Zeno (something which he himself had proposed to Constantinople at a time when he had been warring against the Romans periodically), to 'legitimately' overthrow the 'usurper' Odoacer. Before the Roman elite Theodoric pretended, at

least initially, to rule as the emperor's viceroy in the west.⁷

The fact that this was merely empty rhetoric (like the empty pronouncements of allegiance by some non-Chinese rulers of northern China, mentioned above, to the native southern Chinese rulers) is shown by what followed. The Goths did not wait for any authorization from Constantinople before declaring Theodoric king of Italy, although Theodoric himself chose the title *Gothorum Romanorumque rex*, rather than *rex Italiae*. Whatever links the Romans may have conjured up between the Eastern Roman emperor and Theodoric, to the Goths themselves this was less than a mere formality that could easily be ignored or utilized to their advantage depending on the context. Theodoric certainly made good use of his 'commission' from Emperor Zeno to subjugate and render docile the Roman population of Italy, who still considered the authority of the emperor of the east to be legitimate. Theodoric for his own convenience allowed and at times even actively encouraged the Romans to entertain the pleasant fiction that nothing had really changed in Italy. In the same way Odoacer, before Theodoric's arrival, went so far as to mint coins in the name of Nepos (nominal Western emperor, exiled from Italy) whom he had helped overthrow and later minted those of Zeno, the eastern emperor, for the same purpose.⁸

The two Hunnic-Germanic kings took great pains to preserve much of the trappings and the paraphernalia of Roman imperial rule like the tradition of the long-defunct consulship. In order to gain the loyalty of the Italian elite they flattered the senatorial class by offering them non-threatening positions in government⁹ and they retained much of the former Roman administrative structure.¹⁰ This helped to create a deliberate ambiguity that served these kings well. The Hunnic-Germanic kings of Italy thus softened the impact of their violent conquest by conciliating the old Roman senatorial elite and playing along to the tune of old Roman customs and practices, as long as this helped strengthen their control over the new Italy they gradually brought into being.

Another direct consequence of the Hunnic intervention in Europe was the birth of the kingdom of the Franks. The founder of new powerful Frankish Merovingian state was King Childeric, a former vassal of Attila the Hun.¹¹ Childeric is identified by the Hungarian scholar Bona with the elder of the two claimants to the Salian Frankish throne mentioned in Priscus,¹² the one supported by Attila and opposed by Aetius. This identification is made highly likely by details of Childeric's early life preserved in garbled form in the Chronicle of Fredegar, in which he is said to have been taken into 'captivity' along with his mother by the Huns. He is said to have been 'freed' from this 'captivity' by a resourceful retainer called Wiomad, a

Hun who would feature very prominently in Childeric's rise to power.¹³

According to both Fredegar and Gregory of Tours (a major source of information on the Franks), Childeric was allegedly expelled by the Salian Franks for his outrageous behaviour. After his expulsion from his tribe he is said to have lived in exile in Hunnic controlled Thuringia for eight years.¹⁴ It has traditionally been thought that Childeric started off his career as the vassal of the Roman general Aegidius and that he was initially under Roman protection. However, evidence from Childeric's tomb filled with items strongly indicative of Danubian Hunnic influence¹⁵ suggests that the source of his power was not the Roman army, but Hunnic support. Gregory of Tours confusingly tells us that the Roman general Aegidius ruled over the Franks for eight years as king during Childeric's exile in Thuringia. Scholars taking Gregory for his word have thus dated Childeric's exile to 456 AD and his return to 463 AD, when he is thought to have formed some kind of an alliance with the Romans against the Visigoths.

However, these dates simply do not make any sense in the light of what we know about Aegidius' activities in Gaul and the 24 year reign attributed to Childeric.¹⁶ Gregory attributes a 30 year reign to him.¹⁷ Since Childeric was dead by 481 AD, this would mean his reign or independence from whatever authority (Hunnic or Roman) began in 451 AD (if he reigned for 30 years) or 457 AD (if 24 years). Neither allows sufficient time for an eight year Roman interregnum under Aegidius, since Aegidius became prominent as a general under the Western Roman emperor Majorian in Gaul only ca. 457AD.¹⁸ Even if his rise to power began under the earlier emperor Avitus in 455 AD, this still does not provide enough time. Childeric's 'exile' is likely to have commenced around 451 AD or earlier when Attila got involved in the Frankish succession dispute.

Childeric was probably expelled by the Salian Franks sometime shortly after the defeat and death of the Frankish king Chlogio/Chlodio at the hands of Aetius ca. 449/450 AD.¹⁹ Most Salians, except those that possibly followed Childeric into Hunnic territory, would then have fought for the Romans as auxiliaries and possibly stayed in Roman service after the battle of Chalons under the Roman general Aegidius until they invited Childeric back to rule them in 457 AD (hence the eight year Roman 'rule' under first Aetius, then Aegidius from 449/450 AD–457 AD). This would then validate both the later tradition of him and his mother being 'abducted' by the Huns (his flight to Hunnic controlled Thuringia in 449/450 AD) and that of him being in exile for eight years until his enthronement as king of all the Salian Franks in 457 AD (hence a reign of 24 years until 481 AD). The

other reference to a 30 year reign may be referring to the commencement of his rule over a portion of Salians and other Franks who submitted to Attila in 451 AD well before he added the majority of the Salians to his rule in 457 AD. Fredegar claims that the bulk of the Franks (Salian) revolted from Aegidius and reverted back to Childeric because Aegidius, having been tricked by the Hun Wiomad, tried to impose taxes on the Franks.

Childeric thus presumably fought for Attila at Chalons, as a commander in Attila's army²⁰ and was then left behind as a 'governor' of new Hunnic conquests in Gaul (the Frankish lands west of the Rhine) with a Hunnic garrison. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that the mysterious Hun Wiomad, who is extremely influential in the story of Childeric's rise to prominence and who was powerful enough to be recognized as a sub-king in his own right by the Franks,²¹ is said to have rescued Childeric from captivity among the Huns, a garbled recollection no doubt of the fact that Childeric was installed in power by the Huns and Wiomad was presumably his Hunnic overseer who later deferred to him when Hunnic authority in Gaul crumbled. Wiomad would thereafter represent the key Hunnic element within the Frankish army.²²

In the narrative of Childeric's reign the main figure who is responsible for setting up Childeric as king of the Franks is Wiomad (with his Huns obviously). It is Wiomad who deceives Aegidius and thereby engineers Childeric's elevation to the Salian Frankish throne. It is also Wiomad who is said to have persuaded the emperor Maurice (an Eastern Roman emperor who lived 539 AD–602 AD, probably a garbled reference to Attila) to give Childeric a vast treasure with which to defeat Aegidius and kill many Romans.²³ Obviously the sixth century emperor Maurice associating with Childeric in the fifth century is chronologically impossible, but the presence of large quantities of Eastern Roman coins in Childeric's grave suggests that the record of him getting a vast treasure from some eastern source is accurate. Who else could have possessed a hoard of East Roman coins east of the Rhine other than Attila himself who collected an annual tribute from the East Romans and distributed the gold as reward to his vassals?

Furthermore, we find in Fredegar a fascinating origin myth which attributes a common ancestry to both the Franks and the Turks. The Turks here, as mentioned briefly earlier, are obviously the Huns. The original united group is said to have separated into two in the Danubian region. One of them migrated further west to become the Franks and the other stayed in the Danubian region to become the Turks.²⁴ The claim to kinship with the Turks (Huns) reflects the real, historical absorption of oriental, steppe elements in the fifth century

by the Franks and suggests Pannonian/Danubian origins of certain powerful elements within the Frankish elite (such as Wiomad), perhaps even of Childeric himself²⁵ or his 'Thuringian' wife.

Thus, it was no accident that Childeric and his son Clovis emerged as the rulers of post-Attila Gaul. The Hunnic intervention had created a new dominant political entity in the heart of Western Europe and as we shall see shortly the Hunnic Empire would also provide this new nascent Frankish state with its distinctly 'medieval' political system. Like Odoacer and Theodoric whom we have discussed above, Childeric, after the break-up of the Hunnic Empire, embraced the Roman 'cause', at least superficially. He thereby gained the approval of the Gallo-Roman elite and also received Roman official recognition for his occupation of former Roman lands west of the Rhine. The letter of Bishop Remigus of Rheims to Clovis tells us that Clovis' parents (i.e. Childeric and his wife Basina) had official Roman recognition for their administration of Belgica Secunda.²⁶ Needless to say this official Roman stamp of approval meant little to the Franks themselves, but it was a convenient way to render their conquered subjects more docile and cooperative.

IMPACT OF THE HUN INNER ASIAN POLITICAL MODEL

The Huns therefore dramatically altered the political map of Western Europe by destroying the Western Roman Empire that had dominated the region for nearly five centuries. They also facilitated the rise of post-Roman political entities in Europe such as the 'barbarian' kingdom of Italy (that of Odoacer and then the 'Ostrogothic' kingdom of Theodoric) and the 'Frankish' kingdom of Childeric and Clovis. However, this was not their only impact on Western Europe. The political culture of the so-called medieval 'feudal' Europe that followed the 'collapse' of Rome was also to a large extent an unexpected development brought about by the influence of the Huns and other Inner Asians who accompanied the Huns into Europe (for instance the Alans, some times as subjects, at other times as fugitives or rebels to the Huns).

This Inner Asian influx into Europe precipitated fundamental structural and cultural changes throughout Europe, which we will now proceed to observe in some detail. No doubt the new Europe continued to be heavily influenced by the awesome cultural, religious (Christian) and political legacy left by the preceding Roman Empire. Yet, it is arguable that the imprint left by Inner Asian invaders was just as indelible and significant as that of the great Romans. The

political and cultural landscape of Early Medieval Europe was in effect shaped by the mingling and fusion of Roman (Christianized), Inner Asian (Hunno-Alanic) and Germanic influences.

Special attention must be given to the so-called 'feudal' or 'proto-feudal' system of governance which we often associate with Early Medieval Europe. This was without doubt the greatest legacy bequeathed on Europe by the Hunnic conquerors. The 'feudalism' which we mean here is the system in which there is a formal, regulated division of state power between the supreme king and his principal subordinate great vassals often labelled 'sub-kings' or in Western Europe also called by the pre-existing Roman title 'duces'. These sub-kings and dukes were drawn from the highest echelons of the aristocracy and they enjoyed a degree of autonomy, but they still owed their positions and political authority to the supreme king and the central government headed by the supreme king. We might label this system 'centralized feudalism', since it is sharply distinguished from the more chaotic and fragmented political-economic system which we find in later Medieval Europe, the so-called *seigneurie* or manorialism.²⁷ Manorialism in contrast to 'centralized feudalism' denotes a state of affairs in which there is a virtual absence of central government control within the boundaries of the 'kingdom', which has in essence fragmented into an agglomeration of de facto independent local 'fiefs'. The centralized 'proto-feudalism' or 'incipient feudalism' of the Early Middle Ages slowly degenerated into this decentralized manorial feudalism and manorialism was arguably instrumental in bringing about the socio-economic as well as the political and cultural fabric of Early Modern Western Europe.

In the old centralized 'feudal' system of Early Medieval Europe the supreme king obviously had greater authority and better control over the fiefs he distributed to vassals (usually his relatives and high ranking nobles) than later European medieval kings under manorialism. This higher degree of central government control over vassal states and 'appanages' given to royal family members allowed for the augmentation of royal power, despite the appearance of political division and fragmentation. The king preserved the absolute right to take back any lands he had bestowed upon his vassals²⁸ and greater security was obtained by linking core territories of the state to the king via blood ties shared by the lords of these territories with the king who governed from the centre.

This proto-feudal system, as we have seen in our earlier study of Inner Asian political entities, had its origins in Inner Asia, not Europe itself. The system was imported into Europe by the Huns. In Inner Asia a small powerful elite owned vast numbers of livestock which they then rented out to 'tenant' households, who in many ways functioned

like the Medieval European serfs. Political power, large land holdings and ownership of groups of peoples were all in the hands of a very small group of closely related royal clan members and associated top-ranking aristocrats.²⁹ The king or rather the extended royal clan as a collective ruling body was thought to possess a sacred charisma that entitled them to rule with divine consent. Furthermore, despite the appearance of internal divisions and fragmentation resulting from frequent fief allocations and redistributions of land and subject peoples among the elite, these Inner Asian polities always strove to maintain the outward unity of the state and the concept of an undivided dynastic state remained intact.

We see exactly the same system in operation among the Franks and other Germanic and later Slavic peoples after the break-up of the Hunnic Empire in the fifth century AD. As noted above the Turko-Mongol and Iranian states of Inner Asia were distinguished by their observation of the dynastic principle buttressed by the notion of the sacred, hereditary charisma of the ruling royal clan. The concept was pervasive among the Kushans, the Turkic tribes of the fifth century AD and also among the Rouran who co-existed with the Huns (Wei Shu 103.2294 = Bei Shi 98.3255). The Bulgars who succeeded the Huns in Europe not surprisingly also stressed the sacred, divine origins of their ruling dynasty.³⁰ It should come as no surprise then that the Franks, whose kingdom was established with Hunnic support, in imitation of their Hunnic patrons, likewise stressed the sacred charisma of the 'long-haired kings' of the 'Frankish' Merovingian dynasty descending from Childeric and Clovis. The Franks, like the Inner Asian Huns, Turks and Mongols, displayed astonishing attachment to this dynastic principle in sharp contrast to the situation we find in the preceding Roman and Germanic contexts where the dynastic principle never really took root and so-called dynasties never lasted for more than three or four generations (in fact ruling dynasties lasting for three or four generations were exceptional by Roman standards, most lasted barely two generations). The adoption of the Inner Asian brand of legitimacy and dynastic principle led to the establishment of long-lived dynasties in Europe upheld by the notion of sacred charisma and divinely sanctioned authority.

Fascinatingly enough the elite Avars (who were mostly Hunnified after their entry into Europe), who ruled in Central and Eastern Europe during the same time as the Merovingians in Western Europe, were also noted by the East Romans for their long 'snaky' hair. Corippus in his *Laudem Justinii Augusti Minoris*, line 262, talks about how the pagan Avars 'filled the spacious halls with their long hair'. Agathias (*Histories* 1.3.4) actually compares the long hair of the Avars with that of the Franks. The stunning similarity in customs between

the two contemporaneous groups, both heavily influenced by the Huns and identifying elite status with long hair, may not be an accident. It can also be noted that in the Hunnic-Gothic confederation of the Ostrogoths their Hunnic 'Amal' dynasty was likewise in typical Inner Asian fashion given semi-divine status (*Getica* 13.78).

In these Germanic kingdoms heavily influenced by Hunnic practices the authority of the king was notably strengthened in vivid contrast to the virtual impotence of the old Germanic *reguli* (petty kings) whose powers were in essence restricted to emergencies such as war and had little substance in times of peace. The Frankish Merovingian kings, like the Inner Asian steppe rulers they imitated, exercised absolute power over the peoples and lands they controlled.³¹ The vague old Germanic practice of selecting separate leaders or 'kings' for the sacred assembly of the people, the so-called *thing* kingship or *thiudans*, and for war (*reiks/duces*) was done away with. Also out was the spectre of quasi-equal and almost completely independent petty kings/chiefs of different dynastic lineages regularly defying the authority of the king. Instead of this we find among the Franks the regulated kingship and hierarchy of the steppe Inner Asian variety where the supreme king rules in conjunction with his brothers/cousins in a collective system with a clearly stratified ranking system for subordinate sub-kings and dukes.

In exactly the same fashion as among the Huns and other Inner Asian groups, the Franks allocated major fiefs to brothers and cousins of the ruling supreme king who together partitioned the royal realm.³² After the death of the founding king Childeric, we begin to see this process in action. Clovis, Childeric's young heir, found himself ruling the Franks in the company of three other kings, a total of four: Sigibert (king of the Ripurian Franks to the east), Chararic and Ragnachar (a cousin of Clovis who ruled at Cambrai). Just like Attila before him Clovis eliminated his relations to seize supreme power according to the principle of Inner Asian tanistry. Thereafter the concept of the undivided Merovingian dynastic state would remain intact despite repeated partitions that followed the death of every king, again eerily reminiscent of the same phenomenon found in the history of Inner Asian Empires such as the Hunnic Empire.

Curiously enough the division of the kingdom into four parts, an old Inner Asian political practice (recall the four main divisions of the Xiongnu Empire with sub-divisions in each half of the dual system mentioned earlier), is repeated again and again in Frankish history. The Merovingian kingdom somewhat like the steppe empires of Inner Asia had two main divisions, the Salian and Ripurian, later renamed Neustria and Austrasia. Later on the Franks would complicate the situation by adding Burgundy as the third *regnum*. However, besides

Neustria, Austrasia and Burgundy, Aquitaine was furthermore at times governed separately as a fourth kingdom. A coincidental similarity? Perhaps not. There is an even earlier instance of this happening in the Alan (Inner Asian) dominated tribal confederacy that invaded Spain in the first quarter of the fifth century AD. That confederacy after conquering Roman Spain divided it into four territorial divisions. The dominant Alans seized the greatest share, nearly half of Spain consisting of the Roman provinces of Lusitania and Carthaginensis. The subordinate Suebi received half of Gallaecia, the Siling Vandals were allocated Baetica and the Hasding Vandals were left with the other half of Gallaecia.

That all this is probably no accident is shown by what happens at the death of Clovis in 511 AD. The kingdom is divided among his four sons.³³ Was this just because he happened to have four sons or is it symbolic of a structural imitation of the Hunnic Empire? Another partition occurs after the death of Clovis' last surviving son Chlotar I in 561 AD.³⁴ Again the kingdom is divided into four parts.³⁵ These are probably not just random divisions, but the manifestation of a political tradition inherited by the Franks from Inner Asians, most notably the Huns and also probably the Alans who formed a powerful element in Clovis' 'Frankish' army.

Despite these numerous partitions, however, the dynastic state was still regarded by the Franks, as among the Huns, as a single entity.³⁶ This at times led to the complete centralization of state power in the hands of one strong ruler such as Chlotar II in 613 AD.³⁷ The Franks also followed the Hunnic practice of appointing sub-kings and regularly distributed appanages or 'fiefs' to members of the royal family and top ranking nobles. King Dagobert, before he became the supreme Frankish king, was appointed, like Attila before him, a sub-king (in his case of Austrasia in 623–9). Later the same Dagobert in 629 AD would appoint his half-brother Charibert II (629–32) as sub-king of a part of Aquitaine.³⁸

This Inner Asian practice was then inherited and continued by the Carolingians who displaced the Merovingians as the ruling dynasty of the Franks in the eighth century AD. The famous Charlemagne in 781 AD would appoint his two younger sons Louis and Pepin sub-kings of Aquitaine and Italy respectively.³⁹ More distant and less important outlying fiefs and buffer regions between the imperial Franks and foreign powers were given to Frankish dukes who ranked below these sub-kings and were often individuals with local connections. The dukes controlled Bavaria, Thuringia, Rhaetia, Provence, Alemannia and sometimes also Aquitaine.⁴⁰ We have already seen earlier in the book the same practice in Inner Asian steppe empires where important fiefs close to the central core of the state are allocated to members of

the royal family and more distant fiefs are allotted to vassals either selected from the high nobility or local dynasts who have pledged allegiance. Thus the Frankish political system was without doubt a conscious imitation of the preceding Inner Asian state model, imported into Europe by the Huns.

Some might disagree and suggest that all this was not an imitation by the Franks of Inner Asian practices, but rather an imitation of the tetrarchy attempted by the Romans during the reign of the emperor Diocletian (reigned 284–305 AD) or the subsequent Roman system of four praetorian prefectures in the fourth and fifth centuries AD. True, there are certainly superficial similarities, but the tetrarchy in the Roman Empire was a one-off experiment that lasted barely 20 years, which ultimately failed and was not attempted again, while the specific details of the Merovingian dynastic system mentioned above and below point to an imitation of the Inner Asian political model rather than any Roman precedents. The system of prefectures also is clearly different from the dynastic partitions, which were practised among the Merovingians. While the Roman tetrarchy and prefectures were state models formed out of administrative necessity and constraints facing the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity, the Merovingian territorial divisions were caused by pressures exerted by the laws of dynastic succession, which entitled any legitimate male member of the ruling dynasty to his share of territory (as in the Inner Asian context), rather than any administrative concerns. Furthermore, there is simply no equivalent Roman precedent for the Frankish practice of distributing territorial fiefs to royal family members and high-ranking nobles. This practice was clearly based on Inner Asian precedents.

Also instructive is the fact that the oath of loyalty of the vassal lords to the king that typifies the Merovingian political order and also later feudal Europe likewise already had good precedents in the Hunnic Empire where sub-kings and vassals were forced to swear loyalty to the supreme Hunnic king (Jordanes, *Getica* 48.248). The annual Frankish assemblies, where the rank and file of the Frankish army and the grandees of the realm headed by the king discussed foreign policy and also resolved key legal disputes also closely mimics Inner Asian Turco-Mongol assemblies like the Kuriltai where key military decisions, the matter of dynastic succession and critical legal issues were debated and decided upon. The collection of tribute from conquered peoples and vassal states, e.g. from the Lombards in Italy, the more primitive Saxons in Germany and even from the native inhabitants of Gaul itself,⁴¹ rather than resorting to straightforward taxation of the Roman sort, may also be the result of the impact of the Inner Asian tradition of tributary empires. The Frankish institution of

the *missi regii* also closely resembles the functions of the Hunnic *logades* mentioned earlier in the book. Naturally, in all this the great impact of pre-existing Roman administrative structures must also be taken into consideration in the overall assessment of the nature of the Frankish political order. However, what is absolutely clear though is the fact that the Frankish system was a complex hybrid system that mingled some pre-existing Roman institutions and Germanic traditions with new steppe derived political practices and stratified hierarchy.

The impact of Inner Asians on Europe was not limited to the Hunnic influence on the Frankish Empire alone. In fact every major 'Germanic' state entity of the Early Middle Ages took shape only after being subjected to the Huns or mixing with other Inner Asians. The short-lived kingdom of the Alamanni-Suebi, east of the Rhine, conquered very early by the Franks under Clovis, developed a stable kingship only after experiencing Hunnic rule and then becoming subjected to the overlordship of the presumably Hunnic prince Hunimund, king of the Suebi. The Ostrogoths, who derived from the Hunnic Empire and who were ruled by a Hunnic royal house, similarly evolved into a state only after experiencing a prolonged period of Hunnic rule and after absorbing Hunnic Inner Asian political and cultural traditions. This is made apparent by the decimal system of military and social organization which is found among the Ostrogoths that clearly derives from the steppes via the Huns and Alans.⁴²

The Burgundians also evolved into a medieval kingdom after being conquered by the Huns. The Burgundians were almost annihilated by the Huns in 436 AD. The bulk of the survivors were then integrated into the Hunnic Empire east of the Rhine while a smaller contingent of the Burgundians were handed over to Aetius by the Huns and settled in Roman controlled eastern Gaul in Sapaudia as Roman federates. After the fragmentation of the Hunnic Empire in the west the eastern (formerly Hunnic controlled) Burgundians crossed the Rhine and linked up with the Burgundians in Sapaudia, thus forming the Burgundian kingdom. These Burgundians continued to practise to a limited extent Hunnic-Alanic cranial deformation even after settling west of the Rhine. So significant was the Hunnic invasion of Gaul for the Burgundians that it gave them a time-limit on their law suits (*Lex Burg.* 17.1).⁴³

There is still more. The Visigothic kingdom of Toulouse and Spain was also the direct, political consequence of the Hunnic invasion of the Roman Balkan province of Moesia in 395 AD. The invasion provided the incentive for Visigothic military centralization under their then leader Alaric who used the crisis to forge a union of Visigothic and Alanic elements residing in the Balkans.⁴⁴ The Visigoths of Alaric then proceeded to imitate Hunnic and Alanic

political, cultural and military practices. A drastic shift away from infantry-based warfare to mounted warfare of the Hunnic-Alanic type took place. Actual Huns then entered the Visigothic system via the efforts of Athaulf, brother-in-law of Alaric, who was intimately connected to the Huns in some way. He somehow managed to persuade the Hunnic king to provide him with a contingent of Huns to fight with him for Alaric. Buoyed by this military might Athaulf then succeed Alaric as king of the Visigoths.⁴⁵

Like the Franks who imitated the Huns, the Visigoths also had their own version of the Inner Asian concept of the sacrosanctity of the monarch.⁴⁶ Despite being arguably the most Romanized of the Germanic kingdoms, in the Visigothic kingdom the military aristocracy functioned in ways very similar to Hunnic, Frankish and Lombardic aristocracies. The elite burial practices of the Visigoths mentioned in the *Getica* (30.158) thus not surprisingly reflect extensive cultural borrowings from the steppe region. The Visigoths in the early decades of their existence as a political entity also like the Franks exhibited a system of appointing vice-kings in the Hunnic manner. For instance, Frideric shared the kingship with Theodoric the Visigothic king of Toulouse.⁴⁷

The political system of steppe peoples was to a large extent created by their military organization. As a result in steppe empires the bureaucracy and the judiciary functioned essentially as part of the military. A strikingly similar arrangement is also found in Early Medieval, Germanic Europe. Like the military states of the steppe world the new European kingdoms were characterized by the dominance of the military nobility. This nobility was like the warriors of the steppes distinguished from lower social classes by being mounted on horseback.⁴⁸ All civilian hierarchies that had existed during the Roman period became progressively militarized⁴⁹ as in the Xiongnu Empire and other militarized steppe polities. Interestingly we see a mirror image of this also in Xianbei controlled northern China (Tuoba Wei, 386–534 AD), where the Inner Asian conquerors of the Chinese in the east, like their western counterparts, also dominated their subjects via a quasi-feudal, highly militarized administrative system run by a ‘barbarian’, military aristocracy assisted by native bureaucrats in ways remarkably similar to what we find among the ‘Germanic’ successor states of the Roman and Hunnic Empires. Virtually every formerly civilian institution in northern China was militarized by the Tuoba Xianbei, and over 150 years the Northern Wei emperors distributed nearly 850 appanages to reward their military aristocracy and royal princes, with over three-quarters of these ‘fiefs’ being granted exclusively to ethnically Tuoba nobles.⁵⁰

In Merovingian Gaul the power and privilege of this military

nobility was just as great as in Tuoba China. Without the support of this aristocracy the kings could not exercise power effectively. Thus Gundovald in 585 AD was eliminated when he lost the support of the military nobility and was abandoned by his retinue. The Lombards, another Germanic political group influenced by the Huns, were also dominated by this very Inner Asian brand of military nobility. The nobles in the Lombard polity were so powerful that after the deaths of Kings Alboin and Cleph they did not even bother to elect another king for the next ten years until the elevation of Authari as king in 584.⁵¹ Gradually these Inner Asian type military nobles throughout Germanic Europe evolved into the medieval feudal lords with vested interests in lands granted to them by the king.⁵²

The Ostrogothic king Theodoric, whose Goths had controlled Italy prior to the Lombard migration, successfully contained the power of the military nobility by making sure that they visited the royal court regularly to receive the king's gifts. He therefore avoided the later debacle of the Lombards and followed in the footsteps of his Hunnic Inner Asian forebears. The granting of gifts by the king to his subordinate vassals was an integral part of the Inner Asian political system and also incidentally of the neighbouring Iranian political system in Persia with which it was related. The practice served as a social glue binding the 'feudal' order together and the display of generosity became a quintessential virtue of any steppe ruler. Thus a king in Inner Asia in order to maintain his prestige and standing in the eyes of the military nobility had to secure the necessary resources to display his 'virtue' on a grandiose scale, hence the wars waged to collect tribute through military conquest in order to secure those much needed resources. This explains a lot the behaviour of Hunnic, Frankish and other Inner Asian inspired dynastic rulers. Theodoric was acting in a traditional steppe manner.

Theodoric also appointed semi-autonomous military lords who exercised control over frontier provinces in Ostrogothic Italy.⁵³ The military administration of Gothic counts operated beside local civilian Roman administrators,⁵⁴ with the Gothic *comites* holding precedence over any Roman civil officials. This is of course reminiscent of the much earlier Xiongnu and Kushan Inner Asian practice of running a parallel military administration (whose leaders had overall authority, both military and civil) beside a civil administration usually run by bureaucrats recruited from among the sedentary, subject population (who ran the mundane, day-to-day administration). The Xiongnu appointed overall governors with terrible sounding titles such as 'Commandant in Charge of Slaves' with the power, if necessary, to directly tax and conscript corvée labour from the conquered sedentary population of the Tarim basin. This was a military official with overall

military and civil authority much like the Gothic counts. Day-to-day administration of the region, as in Ostrogothic Italy, was left in the hands of vassal 'kings' (equivalent of the Roman senatorial elite in Italy) and local petty administrators. The Kushans, as mentioned earlier in the book, also appointed military lords who had overall authority (military and civil) over India. The Ostrogothic practice of itinerant kingship⁵⁵ also closely mimics the behaviour of the intensely mobile Inner Asian kings. These so-called 'barbarian' kings and kingdoms that replaced the Roman Empire were thus to a large extent Inner Asian in origin and practice.

The powerful impact of Hunnic Inner Asian political practices would continue to reverberate long after the demise of the Huns. The Inner Asian notion of the collective sovereignty of the royal clan was later to be rearticulated perhaps even among the Nordic Danes and definitely among the various Eastern European Slavic peoples. In Denmark (which had earlier in the fifth century probably been subjected to Hunnic conquest according to Priscus) in the ninth century AD a system of dual kingship seems to have been practised⁵⁶ and in this dual monarchy, as among steppe peoples, any male member of the ruling house was considered eligible for kingship. The power of the kings among the Danes was, as in the Hunnic Empire and other Inner Asian polities, dependent on firstly their claim to a certain sacred charisma and secondly the support of the military retinue called 'home-receivers'/'*hembægar*' (comitatus).⁵⁷ The royal clans also interestingly ruled as a collective with brothers sharing in the kingship. A sign of Inner Asian influence or pure coincidence?

More certain is the Inner Asian Hunnic and Avar influence on the Slavic peoples. The invasion of the Huns and later the Avars from Central Asia marked a watershed in the political history of the Slavs.⁵⁸ The Slavs of eastern, central and southeastern Europe all experienced long periods of Hunnic, Bulgar and Avar domination and this had a decisive impact on the nature of Slavic political organization.

Starting with the Slavic peoples of Eastern Europe, the political culture of the eastern Slavs was heavily influenced by precedents provided by steppe polities. So much so that the earliest rulers of the 'Rus' Khaganate, the very first east Slavic state entity, which preceded the much better known Kievan Rus state of the Rurikids, called their ruler 'Khagan'. This Inner Asian title was first introduced into Europe by the Avars and also used by the Khazars.⁵⁹ Even a late tenth century AD Rus ruler like Vladimir was referred to by Rus sources as 'our Khagan'. The Rus princes thus displayed their aspirations to be regarded as the legitimate political successors of the imperial tradition of steppe empires such as the Avar and Khazar Khaganates. The practice of dualism among the Rus may also be an imitation of

preceding Khazar dualism and it is highly likely that the Rus princes borrowed the techniques of governance from contemporary and earlier Turkic states such as Volga Bulgaria (a Hunnic state established in the seventh century AD) and the Khazar Khaganate (of which the lingua franca was the Oghuric Turkic language of the Huns).

The use of the Inner Asian title of Khagan, the adoption of the system of tribute collection, the technology utilized in the construction of the extensive network of long-distance defensive ramparts in the core Kievan region, and the organization of the *druzhina* or military entourage of the princes, may all be imitations of Hun-Bulgar-Khazar practices. As a matter of fact Kiev, the capital of Rus, is also likely to have been originally a Khazar garrison town. The city's Rus rulers like their steppe predecessors regarded their state as a family inheritance, not the property of a particular individual. The practices of collective rule among the Rus and aristocratic conferences that closely resemble the Turco-Mongol *kuriltai* speak volumes about the intensity of Inner Asian influence on the eastern Slavs long before the well-known impact of the later Mongols on the eastern Slavs between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries AD.

Moving on to the western Slavs in Central Europe, the impact of Inner Asian Hunnic and then Avar rule on them was equally profound. The first independent kingdom among the Slavs, according to the *Chronicle of Fredegar* (Book 4. 48), was brought into being by the rebellion of the sons of the Huns born from the wives and daughters of the Slavs, *Filii Chunorum quos in uxores Winodorum et filias generaverant tandem non subferentes maliciam ferre et oppression, Chunorum dominatione negantes—ceperant revellare*. The Huns mentioned here in Fredegar are probably not the Attilid Huns, but the largely hunnified Avars and possibly also elements of the Bulgar Huns who together with the Avars constituted the ruling core that created the Avar Khaganate in the second half of the sixth century.

The story told by Fredegar suggests that the Hun-Avars had a significant impact on early Slavic political organization and state foundation.⁶⁰ A significant Turkic speaking (Hunnic and Avar) element played a critical role in the establishment of political structures and dynasties in the western Slavic sphere. The so-called 'wendish dukedoms' that the Franks came into contact with in Central Europe were no doubt either clients set up by the Avars or like the obscure Blatnica-Mikulčice group dominated by elites who had inherited Hunnic-Avar political practices.

Likewise probable is the impact of the Avars on the Polabian Slavs in what is now modern eastern Germany. We find among them the now familiar principle of collective rule among members of the royal clan. Thus the Polabian Weletians in the eighth and ninth centuries AD

had a supreme prince Dragowit (rex) who had authority over other 'reguli' in the tribal confederacy/kingdom. Later the supreme prince Liub (*totius regni summa*) is shown to have shared his authority with his brothers, each of whom controlled a *regio* (a federation of clans headed by a prince). Interestingly there were four principal *regiones*/sub-divisions among the Weletians as among earlier and contemporary steppe confederations. As in any Inner Asian steppe state in this Slavic political entity in the middle of Europe a single dynasty had exclusive rights to the princely throne.⁶¹ Not only these Polabians, but also many of the other northwestern Slavs such as the Sorbs and the Abodrites were also likely to have been heavily influenced by former dissidents of the Avar-Hun Empire who moved to their region.⁶²

The Slavic state of Greater Moravia that arose after the dissolution of the Avar Khaganate at the hands of the Franks and Bulgars in the ninth century AD was also, not surprisingly, affected by Avar political precedents. The Moravians are known to have adopted the Avar title of zhupan.⁶³ In Moravia and also later in Poland a system of fraternal rule and succession developed which gave each of the king's sons his own appanage as in the Hunnic and Avar Empires.⁶⁴ However, despite the appearance of territorial divisions and fragmentation, like in the Hunnic and Frankish contexts we have observed earlier, these Slavic states maintained the outward political and territorial integrity of the state.

In southeastern Europe the Hunnic impact on the local Slavs is also palpable, this time via the Bulgars. The title and institution of zhupan, noted above among the Moravians who were themselves imitating the Avars, was a common Inner Asian political title. It was used for instance in the White Hun Hephthalite Empire to refer to a minor official.⁶⁵ The title became the established designation of the ruling prince in medieval Croatia and Serbia via most likely a Hunnic Bulgar filter or less likely via the Avars. The South Slavic title 'ban' may also derive from the name of the Avar Khagan Bayan.⁶⁶ The South Slavic and also later east Slavic aristocratic class system of boyars was likewise a borrowing from the Bulgar Huns.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the Croats and Serbs would in the typical Inner Asian manner use colour designation for their political divisions. We learn from Constantine Porphyrogenitus about the 'White' Croats and 'White' Serbs close to the realm of the Franks.⁶⁸

The strikingly Inner Asian political organization of the Croats and Serbs allows for some interesting conjectures about their origins. An Inner Asian Sarmatian origin for the Croat and Serbian ruling elite has already been postulated. However, the remarkable similarities between the Croatian foundation legend of the five brothers and the history of the five sons of the Bulgar Hunnic ruler Kubrat, the

variation of whose name has been suggested as the etymological origin of the ethnonym Croat, deserve greater attention and research. Also deserving of further scrutiny is the remarkable similarity between the name Serb and the name of the Mongolic Xianbei, in Early Middle Chinese: 'Serbi'. The possible connections between the name Avar and the name of the Mongolic confederacy Wuhuan (in Early Middle Chinese: Agwan(r)) and the name Sabir with the name Serbi (Xianbei), have already been discussed earlier in the book. The Wuhuan (Avar) and the Xianbei (Serbi) were members of the same united Donghu confederation that was conquered by the Xiongnu (Huns) in Inner Asia. If the Avars of Hungary are indeed to be ultimately associated with the Wuhuan, then the association of the ruling elite of the neighbouring Serbs with the Xianbei/Serbi might not be a wild conjecture.

THE IMPACT OF THE HUNS AND ALANS ON EUROPEAN MILITARY PRACTICES

The Huns and their subjects (sometimes enemies) the Alans also profoundly influenced both Germanic and Roman military organization of the Early Middle Ages. From their Inner Asian foes and overlords the Ostrogoths of Italy and even the Vandals of North Africa adopted the institution of chiliarchs (millenarius). This institution reflects the radical re-organization of Germanic armies post-Hunnic conquest in imitation of the already familiar steppe decimal system of military organization. Such re-organization in imitation of the Huns and Alans also had repercussions for the social-political organization of the Vandals and Goths. Instead of the old clan-based armies, which consisted of undisciplined mobs fighting in units of different sizes, a new socio-political order was reflected in the formation of more tightly organized military forces. This then allowed for a greater degree of political control by the king over his formerly unruly subjects.⁶⁹ That amounted to a social and military revolution which facilitated state formation among the until then stateless Germanic peoples.

Not only the Germanic peoples, but also the Romans noticed all too often the overwhelming military superiority of steppe mobile armies. Hunnic battle tactics and military practices were eagerly adopted by the Roman army, especially by the Roman cavalry. The Roman writer Vegetius would actually lament the decline in quality of the traditional Roman infantry due to what he regarded as the excessive focus on improving the cavalry wing of the Roman army.⁷⁰ Both heavy and light cavalry and most importantly mounted archers were

introduced into the Roman military system to allow the Roman army to cope with the new innovations in tactics emanating from the steppes with the Huns and later the Avars.

In fact the late sixth century AD East Roman military treatise attributed to the emperor Maurice, the *Strategikon* (1.2, 2.1), tells us that the Romans were so overawed by the Huns and the Avars that they imitated virtually everything in the arsenal of their Hunnic-Avar opponents from tents and flexible battle array to basic equipment such as bows and armour. This adoption of Hunnic battle tactics and military practices in general sometimes paid off handsomely for the Romans. Agathias (1.22.1) for instance describes how Narses, the East Roman general in Italy, used the Hunnic tactic of the feigned retreat to inflict a massive defeat on the Franks. The *Strategikon* also relates how the Romans adopted the superior military technology of Avars, most notably the iron stirrup. The enormous impact of Inner Asian stirrups on later medieval feudal armies in Western Europe is well known. Via this new innovation from the steppes and other accoutrements likewise from the steppes the medieval mounted knight was born. Adoption of Hunnic practices became so rampant among the Romans that some residents of Constantinople in the sixth century went so far as imitating Hunnic dress as a mark of fashion.

No less important was the critical role of the Alans in disseminating Inner Asian military culture (which they shared in common with Huns) to Western Europeans. The Alans of Inner Asia were conquered by the Huns and most of them submitted to Hunnic rule in the late fourth century AD. However, a substantial minority refused to accept subservience to the Huns and forced their way into Roman Europe at the head of a rebel tribal confederacy consisting of themselves in the position of hegemons, the Vandals and Suebi in 405–6 AD. Despite their rejection of Hunnic political domination the Alans, given their Inner Asian origins, had a close affinity with the culture of the Huns.⁷¹ Even before the conquest of the Huns in the late fourth century the Alans already shared key military and other eastern cultural traits in common with the Huns. This made them virtually indistinguishable from the Huns both culturally and militarily. It is therefore possible to regard the Alans and Huns as forming a single closely linked Central Asian cultural unit, though they were at times politically and ethnically distinct. Certainly in terms of dress and weapons there was little to distinguish a Sarmatian-Alan from a Hun.⁷²

Unlike the Huns who for the most part posed as the destroyers of Roman imperial authority, at least during the reign of Attila, many of the Alans accepted service within the Roman army. Their contribution to the maintenance of Roman rule in the fifth century AD and impact

on the process of transformation of the Roman army mentioned above were by no mean insubstantial. In Gaul and Italy in particular the Alans became the core of the Roman imperial army and served the empire loyally in its wars against the Goths and the Huns. For instance the Visigothic king Alaric was defeated repeatedly by the formidable Alan cavalry under Saul, who perished while serving under Stilicho in the defence of Italy from the Visigoths.⁷³

In the east too Alan influence rose to unparalleled heights when Aspar, the son of the Alan general Ardaburius, became the de facto king-maker of the Eastern Roman Empire. Ardaburius had earned fame by defeating the Sassanian Persians in Arzanene in 421 AD and then again near the city of Nisibis.⁷⁴ His son Aspar would vastly exceed the already impressive achievements of his father by becoming the Roman generalissimo. Emperors of the Eastern Roman Empire such as Marcian and his successor Leo were hand-picked puppets of Aspar, who in effect ruled in the name of the emperors.⁷⁵ The army was under his control and it was Aspar who directed Rome's wars against the Huns and Vandals, often to the detriment of the Romans. His fall would lead to the end of Alan predominance in the east, but in the west the crucial role of the Alans continued.

After the death of the above mentioned Visigothic king Alaric, his successor Athaulf decided to take his Visigoths into Gaul and there the Goths were again frustrated by a group of Alans at the siege of Vasatae in 414 AD. These Alans, who had initially sided with the Goths, switched sides and became the federate allies of the Romans. This led to the defeat of the Visigoths.⁷⁶ The main group of Alans in the west, however, was the group led by King Respendial and later King Addax. They were the Alans who led the tribal confederation of the Alans, Vandals and Suebi mentioned earlier.⁷⁷ The Vandals who were then under Alan overlordship quickly adopted the mounted warfare of their rulers abandoning their traditional mode of warfare based on infantry.⁷⁸

Most of the Alans after sweeping through Gaul like a torrent led the tribal confederacy into Spain. Once there they carved up Spain among the allied tribes. Unfortunately for them the Romans and the Visigoths inflicted a major defeat on them in Spain and the much reduced Alans were forced to accept second place in the newly organized tribal alliance headed by the Vandal king Geiseric, who incidentally may have been half-Alan through his mother. Geiseric and his son Huneric (interestingly this name means Hun king, indicative probably of the awe with which the Vandals held the Huns) styled themselves the kings of the Alans and Vandals and went on to establish in North Africa the Alan-Vandal kingdom of Carthage. The Alans together with their Vandal allies would later in the sixth century become victims of

the East Roman reconquest under Justinian.

However, some of the Alans did not follow these better-known Alans who migrated into Spain and Africa. They chose to remain in Gaul and reconcile with the Romans. These Alans eventually became an important part of the landed aristocracy of medieval Gaul and Italy.⁷⁹ They had a history as turbulent and noteworthy as their kin in Spain and Africa. They held back the mighty Huns during the siege of Orléans and played a significant role in the battle of Chalons that followed. After the disastrous defeat in that battle the surviving Alans retreated to the Loire where they defeated the pursuing Huns in 452 AD, a victory, which due to Jordanes' distortion of events, has erroneously been attributed to the Visigoths. The Visigoths in fact took advantage of the Alan preoccupation with fighting the Huns to strike them from behind. The Alans were pushed into northwest Gaul where they subsequently formed the core of the Armoricans.⁸⁰

In northwest Gaul the Alans operated together with the Roman general Aegidius against the Visigoths and they also struggled later against the Franks under Clovis. In 502–3 AD the Alans at the head of the Armoricans inflicted a sharp defeat on Clovis.⁸¹ Clovis would win over the Alans to his cause however when he gained the recognition of the Eastern Roman emperor Anastasius, to whom the Alans remained loyal. Thousands of Alan horsemen were now added to the Frankish army and with this much augmented force Clovis vanquished the Visigoths and united Gaul.⁸² If the Huns under Wiomad had played a decisive role in the foundation of the Frankish state, the Alans of Armorica played an equally significant role in the unification of Gaul under the Franks.

The presence of these Hunnic and Alan elements in the Frankish nobility and military meant that their influence would endure in Western Europe long after both the Alans and the Huns had disappeared as political groupings. One of the most noticeable traces of their influence is the aristocratic, equestrian tradition of the mounted knight in Medieval Europe. The Romans introduced into Western Europe cavalry that looked similar to the heavy armoured cavalry of medieval times. This new type of cavalry had developed in imitation of the more genuine heavy armoured cavalry found in Inner Asia (among the Huns, Sarmatians and Alans) and the new Roman cavalry units were in some cases made up of actual Inner Asian mercenaries.⁸³ When the Huns and Alans entered Europe this new fighting style became the recognized norm. Thus, in medieval times the mounted armoured knight became synonymous with the class of nobility.⁸⁴

This new mounted nobility of the Middle Ages employed conventional steppe tactics in warfare, for instance, the feigned

retreat, which was employed by William the Conqueror at Hastings and by other mounted troops in western France. Quite fittingly perhaps the person who executed the decisive maneuver at Hastings was Count Alan of the Bretons, then serving under William.⁸⁵ The favourite sport of these medieval mounted elites and their rulers was hunting on horseback. The royal hunt of highly militarized kings and aristocrats dressed in the Hunnic-Danubian style with abundant gold ornaments and Central Asian belts was a regular feature among the Franks.⁸⁶ These Western European elites were obviously imitating very similar practices among the Huns and other Inner Asians.⁸⁷ As if any further proof of this Inner Asian influence was needed, the most famous hunting dog of Medieval Europe was called 'Alanus' and the breed, like the practice of royal-aristocratic hunting, derived from the steppe zone.⁸⁸

Odo of Cluny has left us a vivid image of the typical medieval aristocrat. He notes that the principal activities of the noble Gerard of Aurillac were hunting, archery and falconry.⁸⁹ Quite strikingly these were also the very activities that engaged the nobility of Inner Asia before, during and after the Huns. The typical Inner Asian aristocrat was expected to be proficient in riding, archery, hunting and trekking on horseback, and of course falconry, a sport introduced into Europe by Inner Asians such as the Huns and Alans.⁹⁰ It has even been proposed that the medieval aristocratic practice of meat-eating, which was found notably among the Franks and other Germanic peoples,⁹¹ was a practice influenced by steppe dietary customs that focused almost exclusively on meat-eating. Priscus of course famously tells us that Attila was noted for eating just meat and nothing else during Hunnic banquets.⁹²

We should also note that Hunnic etiquette and court ceremonials are closely echoed in later medieval court practices. Somewhat less desirable Inner Asian practices, such as the blatantly militaristic and somewhat gruesome custom of turning skulls of slain enemies into drinking cups, were also adopted by the Germanic elites during the Early Middle Ages. For instance Alboin, the sixth century AD Lombard king, when he defeated his rival the king of the Gepids made a goblet out of his enemy's head.⁹³ This somewhat grotesque and terrifying practice has a long history in the steppes and was noted first among the Inner Asian Scythians⁹⁴ and the Xiongnu Huns. The Chinese historian Sima Qian records how the Xiongnu Shanyu made a drinking cup out of the skull of the defeated king of the Yuezhi.⁹⁵ A very similar fate awaited the head of the defeated Eastern Roman emperor Nicephorus I in the early ninth century AD at the hands of the Bulgar Khan Krum, Attila's heir in the Balkans. Such was the 'popularity' of this custom that it persisted right until the end of the Middle Ages and

its last application is recorded in the sixteenth century when the Kurdish-Turkic king of Persia Shah Ismail turned the head of the Uzbek Shaybani Khan into a goblet decorated with precious jewels to celebrate his victory.

CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC INFLUENCE OF THE HUNS IN THE LIGHT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

The first clear indication that can be seen in the archaeological record which points to Hunnic cultural influence is the so-called Hunnic cranial deformation practised by the Inner Asian nobility of the Hunnic court and mimicked by the Germanic aristocracy who were either ruled or influenced by the Huns. Hunnic cranial deformation was practised to create a clear physical distinction between the nobility and the general populace. Thus, whoever is found practicing this custom was clearly trying to look like an aristocratic Hun. This practice as well as other Hunnic traits can be found throughout much of the Danubian region. For instance, spectacular warrior graves dating from the period of Attila's rule have been found in what later became Rugian territory in the middle Danube. The elite of the Rugians and their neighbours, the Thuringians and the Lombards, are known to have practised Hunnic cranial deformation. The more easterly Goths and the Gepids who experienced longer periods of Hunnic rule practised Hunnic cranial deformation much more intensively⁹⁶ and this is clearly indicative of the presence of a strong Hunnic element within the ruling elite of these tribes as explained earlier in the discussions concerning Ardaric and Valamer.



FIGURE 8.1 Hun cranial deformation – Budapest

Courtesy of Mr Peter Mayall

Among the Western tribes Hunnic influence seems to have been particularly strong among the Thuringians who are said to have given refuge to Childeric the Frank during his exile. The influence of the Huns on the Thuringians appears to have been pervasive and was far from being a brief passing phenomenon. It was by no means confined to just cranial deformation. Thuringian military armaments and much of their equestrian culture were clearly adaptations of eastern steppe models transmitted via a Hunnic filter.⁹⁷ Cranial deformation is found even among the western-most Germanic tribes such as the Burgundians. In all likelihood this was due to the impact of Hunnic domination of the Burgundians in the mid fifth century AD.⁹⁸ It may also be possible that the Burgundians took over the practice of artificial cranial deformation from the Alans (unlikely) who also practised cranial deformation or from the Goths who adopted the practice from the Huns.

Cranial deformation was first introduced into Europe, it seems, by the Sarmatians and Alans before the Hunnic Invasions. However, the extraordinary diffusion of this practice was without doubt caused by Hunnic conquests in the fourth and fifth centuries AD and the extent of

Hunnic Inner Asian influence can be estimated by the spread of this bizarre practice across the entirety of the European landmass in the fifth century AD. However, analyzing the full extent of Hunnic influence on Medieval European art and material culture is fraught with difficulties because of confusion regarding the provenance and nature of some of the art and material culture which we simply label 'Germanic' or 'Danubian' and classify as native European rather than hybrid Eurasian.

The continent of Eurasia was never geographically divided into a separate Europe and a separate Asia in the archaeological record. Even among the Greeks who first came up with the idea of two separate continents, the steppes of upper Eurasia were considered to be one geographical unit with Europe and the region was included in the continent of Europe rather than in Asia. We now know of course that the Greek geographical division of southwestern Eurasia (West Asia or 'Near East'), which they called Asia, from Upper Eurasia, was based on faulty geographical knowledge. Only by casting aside preconceived notions of Europe and Asia can we fully appreciate the extent of Inner Asian impact on Europe which culminated in the establishment of the Hunnic Empire in Europe.

In order to accurately analyze the cultural influence of the Huns we must also recognize that via the Eurasian steppe Inner Asian material culture and artistic influences had already been seeping into Europe for over a thousand years before the arrival of the Huns. Much of southeastern Europe from Hungary to the Ukraine was at some point in the first half of the first millennium BC conquered by the Iranian speaking Scythians from what is now Kazakhstan. The Scythians emerged from exactly the same place in Inner Asia from which the Huns would also later make their grand entry into Europe at the expense of the Alans and Goths.⁹⁹ The earlier Scythian intrusion into Central Europe was in effect a forerunner of the later invasions of the Huns, Avars and Mongols. Like all of their successors from Inner Asia the Scythians made a significant cultural impact on Europe, which manifests itself in the influence of Scythian art on Celtic art.¹⁰⁰

Thus, there were elements of Inner Asian culture already deeply ingrained in the artistic traditions of Central and even to some extent Western Europe before the arrival of the Huns. In the Sarmatian-Alanic period that followed the Scythian hegemony, most noticeably in the third century AD, eastern steppe motifs and art styles started to have a major impact on Western Eurasian steppe art. This can be seen most clearly in the design of the so-called 'Sarmatian' gold diadems. The gold diadem had been in production since much earlier in the eastern steppes and samples of early Saka-Hunnic diadems in the same or similar style as the later 'Sarmatian' diadems were discovered in

Kanattas near Lake Balkash in eastern Kazakhstan.¹⁰¹ This is of course an area very close to the original homeland of the European Huns and diadems comparable to samples found in both Sarmatian areas and those earlier samples in Kazakhstan were also found in Hungary. They date to the time of occupation by the Huns.

Influence across the steppes was often mutual and as a result by the fourth and fifth centuries AD it is nearly impossible to distinguish what is Hunnic from what is Sarmatian in the archaeological record, especially in the west, because the two groups had by then become so similar in terms of material culture via a long extended period of intense acculturation. The fusion of elements of Sarmatian and Hunnic cultures can already be noted in the later centuries of the first millennium BC in the Altai region, the homeland of the European Huns, almost five centuries before the Hunnic eruption into Europe.¹⁰² Subsequently the Huns and other Oghuric Turkic peoples again mixed extensively with the Iranian speaking peoples in Kazakhstan and northern Central Asia in general before the fourth century, influencing them and being influenced by them in turn. The culture and art of the Huns therefore was already hybrid and had a strong Iranian (Sarmatian-Alan) flavour and vice versa.

Thus, we must first take into consideration this hybridity before labelling any artefact in the western steppes and Central Europe during the Hunnic Empire as specifically belonging to 'ethnic' Huns or Sarmatians. These are erroneous designations, since the artwork belongs to the culture of the wider steppe region rather than a specific ethnic entity. However, since the name Hun is a political as well as a cultural designation that embraces all the inhabitants of the western steppe zone in the fourth and fifth centuries AD, the art should be labelled accurately as Hunnic imperial art. Eastern steppe influence was already making itself felt in the west even before the actual arrival of the Huns by a long process of diffusion and the Huns in the east in turn were being exposed to western steppe Sarmatian-Alan culture in Central Asia. Simultaneously in the third and fourth centuries AD all this was also affecting what is commonly known as eastern Germanic art that absorbed Sarmatian cultural influences.

The 'Sarmatian' diadems of gold discussed above, which clearly show the influence of earlier eastern diadems, were decorated in pearls, garnets and amethysts, a style which became typical of Early Medieval 'Germanic' artworks.¹⁰³ On the upper rim of the Sarmatian diadems were *cervidae* and tree designs reflecting the tastes and ornamentation of eastern steppe art.¹⁰⁴ The thighs of animal designs in the diadems were deliberately hollowed into pear-shaped sockets for the placement of precious stones. This is likewise a style that appears commonly in silver belts and other art objects worked in

precious metal found across Siberia and especially in the region of Lake Baikal north of Mongolia, the former eastern territory of the Huns-Xiongnu.¹⁰⁵ Other Sarmatian objects from the same third century AD, such as scabbard-ornaments in the form of sledges or ringed sword-pommels, are also likely to be based on eastern steppe prototypes.¹⁰⁶

These artistic influences emanating from the eastern steppes had some interesting effects by the fourth century AD. It resulted in a degree of artistic homogeneity across the whole of the steppe zone from the Ordos region in Mongolia in the east to the Alan and Gothic areas in the west.¹⁰⁷ That this homogeneity happened to coincide with the Hunnic expansion across the steppes cannot be seen as an accident. The eastern steppe cultural influences on the west that had begun well before the Hunnic invasions of the fourth century AD, became all-pervasive in the following fifth century, as the Huns unified the western steppes and most of Europe under their rule.¹⁰⁸ The fifth century Hunnic Europe gave birth to a universal art style centred around the Danubian region which combined elements of Hunnic, Alanic, Germanic and Roman art forms and motifs.¹⁰⁹

This was the hybrid art of the Hunnic Empire that influenced all of later 'Germanic' Europe and obviously this art form cannot be labelled as simply 'Germanic' or even 'Danubian'. It was through and through Hunnic and Inner Asian with certain important Germanic and Roman features. The art of the Hunnic Empire was shared in common by all of the empire's subjects regardless of ethnic differentiation. 'Gothic' fibulae in the Danubian style, 'Lombard' mirrors, decorated weaponry and ear-hangings that show strong signs of eastern steppe influence, and 'Frankish-Burgundian' dress items also in the 'Danubian' style,¹¹⁰ all demonstrate the immense cultural impact of Hunnic imperial art in the west. The Hunnic conquests brought about the triumph of a new set of aesthetics in applied arts and triggered within Western European art a veritable shift away from Greco-Roman precedents to the artistic styles and tastes of the east (the steppes and the Iranian world).¹¹¹

The art forms that we commonly label 'Gothic', 'Germanic', 'Early Medieval' and 'Danubian' were thus in reality later manifestations of pre-existing eastern steppe art brought to Europe by the Huns and various Sarmatian peoples such as the Alans. Certainly Germanic craftsmen were involved in the production of these 'Danubian' art works as well as Huns, Alans and maybe even Greco-Romans. However, they were working under the direction of the Huns. The heterogeneous and hybrid nature of the Hunnic state made such collaborations possible and facilitated the birth of this equally hybrid imperial art form. Therefore, the current tendency to mark as Hunnic

only those artefacts found in the company of stand-out items such as the famous bronze Hunnic cauldron and some typically 'Hunnic' military equipment such as the Hunnic saddle is an error. Items such as knives, jewels in glassware, fibulae, clasps, perforated baldric-plates, pins with animal heads, all items found in abundance in Hunnic Europe and which later became characteristic of the art of Early Medieval Europe are equally as Hunnic or Hunnic-inspired as the stand-out items such as the Hunnic bronze cauldron.



FIGURE 8.2 Hunnic bracelet

Courtesy of the Walters Art Museum

It is therefore impossible to justify the rather baffling assumption that there was little Hunnic influence on East Germanic/Gothic culture and art. It has been traditionally argued that Germanic culture remained largely unaffected by Hunnic rule because the 'primitive' Huns had no culture or art to share to begin with and therefore had to adopt 'Gothic' culture and customs once they entered Europe. As shown repeatedly above neither historical sources nor archaeology support the notion of a 'primitive', 'unrefined' or 'artless' Hun society. No expert on Central Asian art or archaeologist familiar with Central Asia would accept the definition of a 'primitive' Hun society. On the contrary Central Asian and wider Inner Asian archaeology are providing us with compelling evidence that the art and material culture of Germanic Europe were indeed heavily influenced by steppe art and material culture.

The difficulty that arises in trying to distinguish what is Hunnic or Alanic (i.e. Inner Asian) from what is Gothic-Germanic in the

archaeological remains of the Danubian region is not due to the 'Germanization' of the Huns, as frequently claimed (although it is probably only to be expected that the Huns experienced a degree of acculturation with Germanic culture and practices), but primarily due to the absorption of Hunnic and other Inner Asian influence by the Germanic subjects of the Hunnic Empire.¹¹² By way of example, it was argued until very recently that the elaborate handle designs on Hunnic cauldrons and the mushroom shaped decorative elements, which to some resembled parts of 'Germanic' fibulae, were marks of Germanic influence on the Huns. However, as Érdy shows, evidence from Inner Asia from the areas of the Baikal, the Altai and the Urals demonstrate very clearly that this was an art style developed much earlier in these eastern regions and not the results of Germanic influence on the Huns.¹¹³ The so-called 'Gothic' plate brooches found in France, Spain and Central Europe, which are almost always without any further thought identified as Gothic, are often not Gothic at all but Alan or hybrid Alan-Gothic in provenance.¹¹⁴

The so-called Aquitanian style of ornamentation found in some 134 artefacts across the whole of France (particularly in the Orléanais, Armorica and southern Gaul), mostly on belt buckles from the sixth and seventh centuries AD, also depict Central Asian motifs of Hunnic-Alan provenance.¹¹⁵ We discover parallel animal ornamentation in Hunnic controlled areas in Hungary and the Ukraine. Interestingly enough in the same seventh century AD very similar, mainly Turkic, decorated belts spread over a vast area stretching from Iraq to China. In China under the Tang dynasty even Chinese dress styles were altered due to heavy steppe influence. Thus Steppe arms, ornaments and modes of fashion were being imitated by a broad range of sedentary cultures across the whole of Eurasia during the Early Medieval period.

The widespread practice of decorating jewellery and weapons with precious stones to create a polychrome cloisonné style, so characteristic of Early Medieval Germanic art, also originates in the steppe.¹¹⁶ Cloisonné style artefacts dating from as early as the late first millennium BC are found in the Altai region, the original home of the Huns¹¹⁷ and similar polychrome art is also found in Alan archaeological remains of the first century AD. Earrings from the third century AD decorated with pearls and semi-precious stones using the cloisonné technique were found in Inner Asia in the Uzboy Region in Turkmenistan.¹¹⁸ In addition there is the remarkable first century AD Sarmatian gold diadem in the polychrome style from the Khokhlach-Novocherkassk barrow grave.¹¹⁹

All these samples naturally pre-date the first samples of Germanic polychrome style art in the fourth century AD. The impact of this very

distinctive polychrome cloisonné style of Central Asian art can easily be seen in the artefacts found in the fifth century AD tomb of Childeric the Merovingian king and contemporary Alamannic, Gepid and Thuringian artefacts, which all exhibit unmistakable signs of Hunnic and other Inner Asian influences. The adoption of Hunnic-Danubian burial practices by the Franks and others, exemplified by finds in the tomb of Childeric, was clearly an expression of their desire to associate themselves with Hunnic imperial precedents. Similarly grandiose ‘Danubian’ style burials for leaders following the Hunnic model would become widespread in Western Europe in the following sixth century AD. Not surprisingly perhaps, the finest objects of this polychrome style of steppe influenced art date to the fifth century and they were produced naturally in the lower Danubian region, the core territory of the Huns.

Thus the adoption of steppe or steppe-inspired art among the Germanic peoples, which had already begun prior to the arrival of the Huns, was greatly accelerated by Hunnic conquest and the influence of this Hunnic ‘Danubian’ art spread as far north as Scandinavia and as far west as Gaul and Spain. The Huns and Alans therefore brought with them to Europe not only a new political culture, but also new imageries, art styles, motifs and aristocratic values that fundamentally altered the very nature of ‘European’ society and this in turn made the so-called Middle Ages, which they brought about, distinct from the equally magnificent culture of the preceding Roman Empire.

NOTES

- 1 Croke (1983), 85. *Anon. Vales.* 8.38.
- 2 Altheim (1948), 23.
- 3 Procopius, 5.1.4.
- 4 Croke (1995), 26–7.
- 5 Cassiodorus 1.18.2, 12.22.5, Fanning (1992), 295.
- 6 Dixon (1976), 77.
- 7 Croke (1983), 115. See also *Anon. Vales.* 11.49.
- 8 Croke (1983), 115. See also Demougeot (1979), 609–14.
- 9 Jones (1964), vol. 1, 253–4; Amory (1997), 8.
- 10 Burns (1980), 113. See also Collins (1999), 109–10.
- 11 Bona (1991), 127.
- 12 Priscus, fr. 20.3, Blockley (1983), 306.
- 13 Fredegar’s *Chronicle* 3 II. See Murray (2000), 612; Bona (2002), 68; Demougeot (1979), 682.
- 14 Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* 2.9.
- 15 James (1988), 62; Périn and Feffer (1987), vol. 1, 114–34.
- 16 Demougeot (1979), 682.
- 17 James (1988), 79.
- 18 Périn and Feffer (1987), vol. 1, 106.
- 19 James (1988), 57–8, 448 AD says Wood (1994), 37.

- 20 Bona (2002), 69.
- 21 Fredegar 3. II.
- 22 Bachrach (1972), 4; Wallace-Hadrill (1958), 541.
- 23 Fredegar 3. II. Wood (1994), 39–40; Wallace-Hadrill (1962), 85, 161.
- 24 *Chron.* 3.2.
- 25 Hummer (1998b), 13–14.
- 26 James (1988), 65, 67.
- 27 Reynolds (1994), 2–3
- 28 Wallace-Hadrill (1962), 7.
- 29 Cribb (1991), 42.
- 30 See Khazanov (2001), 4–5; Krader (1958), 79; Stepanov (2001), 17.
- 31 Ganshof (1971), 87.
- 32 Ganshof (1971), 88–9; Kaiser (1993), 68–71.
- 33 Bachrach (1972), 18; Kaiser (1993), 28; Wood (1994), 50, see Arce (2003), 138–40.
- 34 James (1988), 171.
- 35 Wood (1994), 56.
- 36 Geary (1988), 117.
- 37 See Widdowson (2009), 3, Schutz (2000), 183–4, and Lasko (1965), 213.
- 38 Wickham (2009), 116–19.
- 39 Grierson (1965), 290; Ganshof (1971), 278; McKitterick (1983), 53.
- 40 Geary (1988), 118–19; James (1988), 105–6; Wood (1994), 159–64; McKitterick (1983), 17–8, 23.
- 41 Geary (1988), 100.
- 42 Wolfram (1988), 75.
- 43 Barnish (1992), 38.
- 44 See Schutz (2000), 34, and Kelly (2009), 40.
- 45 Olympiodorus, fr. 26, Blockley (1983), 188. See Todd (1992), 161–2, for the career of Athaulf.
- 46 Culican (1965), 193.
- 47 Wolfram (1997), 151.
- 48 Bloch (1961), 289–90.
- 49 Wickham (2009), 106.
- 50 Kwanten (1979), 16.
- 51 Wood (1994), 56–60; Wickham (1981), 30–2. Whitby (2000b), 471–2.
- 52 Oosten (1996), 224.
- 53 Heather (1995), 154.
- 54 Heather (1995), 160
- 55 Heather (1995), 163.
- 56 Garipzanov (2008), 113–14.
- 57 Roesdahl (1982), 25.
- 58 See Urbańczyk (2005), 143–5; Heather (2009), 401.
- 59 Golden (2001), 29–32.
- 60 Urbańczyk (1997), 42; Brachmann (1997), 27–8.
- 61 Lübke (1997), 120–1; Gringmuth-Dallmer (2000), 65.
- 62 Pohl (1988), 119.
- 63 Třeštík (2000), 193.
- 64 Steinhübel (2000), 200.
- 65 Sims-Williams (2002), 234.
- 66 Róna-Tas (1999), 115.
- 67 Anderson (1974), 231.
- 68 Fine (1983), 51–2; Jenkins (1962), 115 and 118.
- 69 Vernadsky (1951), 369–70, 375.

- 70 Vegetius, *Ep. rei milit.*, 1.20; 3.26. Halsall (2007), 105.
- 71 Sulimirski (1970), 116–17, 144–7.
- 72 Rudenko (1970), 88.
- 73 Bachrach (1973), 34–5.
- 74 Bachrach (1973), 42. Priscus, fr. 20; Evagrius, II, 1; and Socrates, 7.18.
- 75 Whitby (2000a), 308 and Bachrach (1973), 45.
- 76 Pualinus of Pella, *Euch.* 377–85 (ed. Moussy SC 209, p. 84; Brandes CSEL XVI.1, 305–6), Alemany (2000), 67.
- 77 Hydatius, *Cont.* 68 (ed. Mommsen MGH AA XI, 19; Tranoy SC 218, 122), Alemany (2000), 54.
- 78 Bachrach (1973), 58.
- 79 Bachrach (1973), 73.
- 80 See Schäfer (2014b), for an in-depth analysis of possible Hunnic presence alongside the Alans in this distant western extremity of Europe.
- 81 Bachrach (1973), 85.
- 82 Bachrach (1973), 78.
- 83 Vernadsky (1951), 367–8; Bachrach (1999), 293; Sulimirski (1970), 31–2.
- 84 Bloch (1961), 291.
- 85 Bachrach (1973), 91.
- 86 Wickham (2009), 189.
- 87 See Allsen (2006), 16, 40, 189, 266, 269.
- 88 Bachrach (1973), 118.
- 89 Bloch (1961), 303–4; Wickham (2009), 524; Allsen (2006), 59.
- 90 Findley (2005), 31.
- 91 Wickham (2009), 100.
- 92 Frenkel (2005), 212–3; Christian (1998), 142.
- 93 Bullough (1965), 172.
- 94 Hdt. 4.65.
- 95 *Shiji* 110.
- 96 Werner (1956), 15; Schmidt (1983), 541–2; Vernadsky (1951), 366–7; Schutz (2000), 290–1; Buchet (1988), 61.
- 97 Schutz (2000), 411.
- 98 Heather in Thompson (1996), 259.
- 99 Sulimirski (1985), 186; Bashilov and Yablonsky (2000), 10.
- 100 Sulimirski (1985), 173, 192–3.
- 101 Bona (2002), 29, 96–9.
- 102 Khudyakov (1997), 342.
- 103 Bona (1991), 150.
- 104 Halphen (1965), 100; Werner (1956), 66–8.
- 105 Halphen (1965), 100–1.
- 106 Halphen (1965), 101; Brosseder (2011), 412.
- 107 Halphen (1965), 102.
- 108 Bona (1991), 136–7; Werner (1956), 90.
- 109 Bona (1976), 54–5; Kazanski (1993), 213.
- 110 Marin (1990), 49–53; Werner (1956), 32.
- 111 Musset (1975), 200–1.
- 112 See Bona (2002), 114–15, Harhoiu (1980), 106–7, Genito (1992), 64, Sulimirski (1970), 163–4, and Kazanski (1993), 212–13.
- 113 Érdy (1995), 13.
- 114 Sulimirski (1970), 185–6.
- 115 Aberg (1947), 40–69.
- 116 See Werner (1956), 91, Kazanski (1991), 72, 76, and Arrhenius (1985), 44.
- 117 Gryaznov (1969), 166–70.

[118](#) Bader and Usupov (1995), 30, and in the same volume Invernizzi (1995), PL VII.

[119](#) Sulimirski (1970), 156.

CONCLUSION

The Huns were a Eurasian phenomenon. Consequently their history cannot be fully understood unless we adopt a Eurasian perspective. The Huns established empires and state level entities in virtually every region of the vast Eurasian continent. In Inner Asia, their original homeland, the Huns first established the vast and long-lived Xiongnu-Hun Empire that stretched from Kazakhstan in the west to Manchuria in the east. This formidable Inner Asian Empire subjected the mighty Han Empire of China to tribute and for a time was arguably the most formidable military power in Eurasia. After the fragmentation of the Xiongnu state the Huns split into two major groups, the Northern and Southern groups. The Southern Xiongnu migrated into China, became federate allies/subjects of the Chinese Han dynasty and then eventually overthrew the native Chinese in 311 AD in ways reminiscent of the Hunnic and Germanic overthrow of the Western Roman Empire around 150 years later in 476 AD. The Southern Xiongnu-Hun conquest of China heralded nearly 300 years of Inner Asian domination of northern China. During this time the civilization of China absorbed many Inner Asian influences that later gave the still very Inner Asian Sui-Tang dynasties of China their distinctive cultural characteristics.

Elements of the northern group of Xiongnu Huns settled in the Altai region in the second and third centuries AD and from there they later in the fourth century emerged into Western Eurasia as conquerors. These northern Huns of the Altai, if they were a single united nation at the beginning, from the fourth century onwards split into separate groups that do not seem to have professed allegiance to each other. The 'weak' Huns or Yueban Huns, those that were left behind by the 'strong' Huns, remained close to the Altai in the neighbouring Zhetysay region of modern eastern Kazakhstan, displacing the previous Wusun inhabitants of the region. These Huns, descendants of the Xiongnu, whom the Chinese regarded to be the most civilized of the 'barbarians', would be extinguished by the more powerful Rouran (Avars?) from Mongolia in the fifth century AD.

The 'strong' Huns who migrated further west split again into two groups: the so-called White Huns (or western Huns) of southern Central Asia and the European Huns. The White Huns under the leadership of the Kidarite dynasty erupted into Central Asia, conquering the Kangju and then the formerly Kushan territories of

eastern Iran and Afghanistan from the Sassanians. Later in the second half of the fifth century AD the Kidarites dynasty was displaced by a new dynasty supported by the Rouran, the Hephthalites, who took over the rulership of the White Huns. These Hephthalites after eliminating the Kidarites would also conquer both Sassanian Persia, which they turned into a vassal state, and much of Gupta India. In both Iran and India the legacy of the Huns was profound. In Iran the shock of Hunnic conquest facilitated the birth of a Sassanian royal, 'national' history or pseudo-history, a body of literature that would sustain the Iranian identity through long periods of foreign rule during the Middle Ages. In India the Indianized Huns fought off the Arab conquest and the spread of Islam for nearly 400 years, thereby safeguarding the future of the Hindu religion and way of life.

Finally the European Huns emerged like a whirlwind in Europe and conquered all before them. They first overwhelmed the Alans and Goth in Eastern Europe. They then conquered all of 'Scythia' and 'Germania', subjected both halves of the Roman Empire to tribute and fundamentally altered the political geography of Europe. Their arrival and the dissolution of the Western Roman Empire that followed marked the beginning of a new kind of Europe, a 'Medieval' Europe. Thus the impact and geographical scope of the Huns and their conquests were truly Eurasian in character. Wherever they arrived they brought with them a very heterogeneous Inner Eurasian culture that radically altered the culture and destinies of the host population.

The Huns of Eurasia were neither a race nor strictly an ethnic group. The name Hun denoted the concept of Inner Asian imperial rule. It was first and foremost the political appellation of an imperial state or a proto-state with imperial dimensions. In both the east and the west the ruling Huns were a heterogeneous elite speaking multiple languages and possessing multiple identities and ethnic backgrounds. Their primary linguistic and ethnic core in the west seems to have been Oghuric Turkic, but this core element co-existed with significant Iranian and Germanic sub-groups, who just as much as the Turkic Huns constituted the body of the Hunnic state.

Contrary to the image of the primitive horde of nomadic barbarians that they were presumed to be in both traditional and even some contemporary literature, the Huns were politically sophisticated, highly well organized and in military terms superior to their western and eastern adversaries. They would introduce into Europe a new mode of government, a system of rule that would later be defined as 'feudalism' or proto-feudalism. The Germanic peoples of Europe adopted this system of collective rule by a supreme king, multiple sub-kings and a militarized nobility regulated by a highly developed ranking system from the Huns and other Inner Asians who

accompanied the Huns into Europe. The new mobile mode of war based on cavalry armies of heavily armoured knights which characterized medieval warfare and the aristocratic values that permeated this militarized medieval elite were also residues of Hunnic Inner Asian rule and influence.

The new rulers of Early Medieval Europe were also for the most part either Huns by origin or former Hunnic subjects. Those of Hunnic origin were Odoacer the son of Edeco, the first barbarian king of Italy; Theodoric the Great, the Ostrogothic king of Italy who displaced him; Theodoric's father or uncle Valamer, 'the king of the Huns' and founding king of Ostrogoths; and in all likelihood also Ardaric the king of the Gepids. Rulers of non-Hunnic origin, but formerly subjects of the Hunnic Empire, were Childeric, founding king of the Franks enthroned by the Hun Wiomad, and ironically Orestes, the father of Romulus Augustulus (the last ruler of the Western Roman Empire), who had formerly served as the secretary of Attila the Hun.

Other Germanic kings of the west were likewise heavily influenced by Inner Asians. The Vandal kingdom of North Africa was arguably as much Inner Asian Alan as Germanic Vandal. The Visigoths who would establish a kingdom in Spain and southern France were likewise recipients of Inner Asian cultural and political influence. The art and material culture of the Huns and Alans had an equally profound impact on all these Germanic Western European kingdoms, leading to the birth of a hybrid and heterogeneous artistic style which we now call 'Early Medieval' and 'Danubian'.

Lastly the Huns brought about a veritable geopolitical revolution in Western Eurasia. The western fringe of Eurasia was forever after the Hunnic conquest politically separated from the Mediterranean basin. This led to the emergence of the 'Western world' as we know it, a distinct Western European entity freed from Mediterranean hegemony. The political and cultural ethos of this new Europe was born out of the complex fusion of Inner Asian Hunnic/Alanic, Mediterranean Greco-Roman, Germanic and Near Eastern Judeo-Christian traditions and cultural norms. By ending the Western Roman imperium the Huns facilitated the birth of a Western European identity. The emergence of the Huns also began the millennium of virtual Inner Asian monopoly of world power, with minor interludes, until the rise of Western European powers in early modern times.

The Huns, therefore, left an enduring legacy to the Modern World and radically changed the face of the Ancient World across the whole of Eurasia. The history of the Huns and Inner Asia is of critical importance for our understanding of world history. It is about time that the Huns and other Inner Asians are allotted their proper place in human history, as one of the great ancient peoples who changed the

world.

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